

SERBIA CRUCIFIED

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO



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By

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO



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SERBIA CRUCIFIED

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The Beginning

BY

LIEUTENANT MILUTIN KRUNICH

WITH THE AID IN ENGLISH IDIOM OF
LEAH MARIE BRUCE



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THIS BOOK

is dedicated to Mrs. Bruce, who proved
how an American mother could love a
child from the great democratic family.

M. K.

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“THE GRAVEYARD BY THE MORAVA ” and “THE PLACE OF THE SKULL ” are reprinted by permission of the editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*.

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I

THE FALL OF NISH

“How beautiful is this country!” exclaimed Bata, filling his breast with the pure fresh air, and stretching out his arms in a tender imaginary embrace toward the fields, forests, rosy hills, blue mountains, white and peaceful villages of the paradise which sped before our eyes, bathed in an ocean of morning sunlight.

“Beautiful? You might say this of a dress, a hat, a horse, a house, or even an apple, but for this land, our Serbia, it means nothing. To describe her you must use the language of poetry, for her country is poetry and her people are poets. Or you must speak in the voice of thunder, for those hills are pyramids built of the bones of your grandfathers, piled and cemented with their blood; from them the song of liberty has thundered in terrible battles. Or you must use the language of tears, for those brooks are the tears of slaves for five

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centuries; or of song, for the Serbian sings whether he lives in happy liberty, or languishes in chains of slavery. Sing to me, Bata, and I shall understand you best," said Spale,¹ who was sitting by the door of the car.

Bata grew serious for a moment, and then smiled bitterly.

"We artists can never be natural. He is begging me to sing to him while he is going to die! His heart wants a song while 'two' have already grasped him, one at the hair and the other at the feet, and the third, — hmm, — his 'own brother,' has raised his 'brotherly' hand, in which glitters the poisoned knife, with which he wants to pierce this very heart which is singing. You know that the Bulgarian national tradition is: hate; be silent; for the other knife you must have is between your teeth."

"That is the difference between the brothers: *they* have the *knife* between their teeth and cannot sing: *we* have another tradition, quite different: 'sing me the everlasting song'!"

¹ Pronounced Spah-lay.

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My noble comrades! Both were artists. Bata was a poet, a visible, powerful, healthy figure, at the new young and modern Serbian Parnassus. Spale was a painter, an ideal soul, a true artist in his whole being, the flower of an artistic nation, which, as in poetry, so in colors, sought to give an expression of its heart. With his unusual intelligence, great work, indomitable will, and divine genius, Spale had striven to link modern painting with the national painting, to give voice to the national feelings, and thus to give to national art a new direction, from patriarchal simplicity to develop a new and brilliant epoch from which the European critics would determine its place in the artistic world. This had succeeded well in later times; this art had been admired in the salons of Paris and London. Spale's name had, at this time, begun to shine among the other Serbian stars: Mesh-trovich,¹ Vuchetich, Roksandich, Jovanovich,

¹ Meshtrovich, Serbian sculptor, of world-wide reputation, whose exhibition in London raised a storm of admiration. The most famous among his works are "Kossovo Temple," "My Mother," "Milosh Ohilich," "Marko Kravevich," "Srja-Zlopogleja," etc.

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Bucovatz, Vookanovich, Gleeshich, Predich, whose works were, as those of Spale, the interpretation of the Serbian national art.

Bata and Spale were both young, but they had won, by their work, a high place in Serbian society. Both, with their great knowledge, will, and power, and undying love of their country, had put themselves at the head of Young Serbia, guiding it by their genius to a happy future. Each in his own direction had endeavored to show the twentieth-century world that Serbia, although little, had the right, by her progress in all the fields in which other European nations had grown, not only to be a free country, but also, by all her public works to be ranked with modern nations. The work of those two young men, like that of the whole nation during this later period, had flourished with a strange beauty and with tremendous success. Art is the life of a nation, the scale on which its value is computed, the light which brightens a nation, showing to the whole world its life. The artists are the creators of this light, the leaders, the first men, who are glorified by the grateful peo-

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ple. Certainly Bata and Spale had begun to feel the sweetness of a beautiful, deserved glory.

And now? There are no more poets, no more painters, no art, no glory, but only soldiers, desperate defenders of liberty. Liberty is the mother of art, and art is life. When there is no liberty, then there is no art, no life. Now the people who were proud of *their* liberty and *their* art are hurling themselves to destroy Serbian liberty, the liberty of our good mother who had created such beautiful, healthy, sweet, and wonderful children. Yet the children defend and die for their mother. They become as one: poet with blacksmith, minister with workman, painter with peasant, gentleman with shepherd. All are going in one line, the line of soldiers, defenders, a living wall of manly breasts with only one thought: death or liberty.

For this reason Bata and Spale, as simple lieutenants, were mingled with common soldiers, crowded with fifty others in an "H" car, used in time of peace to carry oxen and swine, and they were running toward Pirot,

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there to form a third wall against the third enemy, the "brotherly" Bulgarian.

That of which the Serbian diplomats had the most fear, that which the Allied Ambassadors had worked with all their power to prevent, offering incredible sacrifices, had come: Serbia was surrounded — Serbia, the stumbling-block of the Kaiser and his Junkers, the watchful sentinel of the East, the deep cliff on the road to India, the pyramid at the foot of which had broken the waves of Teutonic invasion, the key of the victory of the Central Powers; her people a band of heroes who, in their own way, had explained the *Drang nach Osten*, little black scarecrows in the midst of Potsdam, a bug in the eye of "*magnissimus* Cæsar." Yes, the firm wall of living breasts now is swaying. Were they not enough for little Serbia — the legions of the two "strongest world-powers"? Was it not enough for the poor Serbians — the dreadful typhus which was made worse by all the Junkers and Hungarians?

No, it was not enough, for Serbia still continues, Serbia is still alive. And, seeing his

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weakness, and fearing new Serbian victories, the Kaiser, forgetting for the moment the honor of his Junkers, with one wink ordered his vassal servant to set the Bulgarian people against Serbia; a people who are worse than this servant, and a people who, unfortunately, know where the brotherly heart is lying. Ever since the war began, the Serbian nation hoped that the Bulgarians would now, at this critical moment, with their free thought, with their Slavic feelings, and their democratic ideas, tear away with one stroke the black curtain which German influence had tied over their eyes, and finally look into the light of truth.

But alas! Now the Serbians were convinced that the Bulgarian nation was really a moral slave, a blind horse, which foreign Coburg pulled by his own will with the German bridle.

Belgrade, Shabatz, Valevo, Laznitca, Smedereno, were all destroyed. But what does it mean to the Kaiser? Nothing. He wants the very heart of Serbia, the point which links Berlin-Bagdad. Yes, he needs Nish. But it is very far from the Sava to Nishava, and the road is very hard over Bagrdan Pass, the Ser-

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bian breast which defends and hides its heart. Because of that there is need of a "brother" who knows just where this heart is. This "brother," with a slashing knife in his hand and another between his teeth, with the sign of hatred on his forehead, silently rushed toward the brotherly heart. From this moment the agony of Serbia began. Death finally found its most comfortable cradle.

And yet, now, those men, those Serbian soldiers, pressed into this big car as grain is held in the hand of a poor man, crowded over us, reaching out their heads through the wide-open door in order to see the divine picture which passed before their eyes. And looking upon the dear little villages, their white churches, their fields and hills, upon all this romantic beauty, upon their poetry, and intoxicated by the sweet perfume of the free and magnificent dawn, their hearts trembled with powerful emotion, and suddenly the song thundered from their breasts.

Aoy, Kayka, what a load I carry!

Your mother's sorrow, now, how can you
marry?

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Ee, yoo, yoo, brides are few,
Ee, yoo, yoo, brides are few,
They keep the ones they'd promised you.

Soldiers, mother, see the guns they carry!
They'll save us and come back, and I shall
marry.

Ee, yoo, yoo, brides are few,
Ee, yoo, yoo, brides are few,
They keep the ones they'd promised you.

This is the song of my regiment. Every Serbian regiment has its own song made by its own soldiers. I cannot explain what this song means to the soldiers. It is a holy thing, the prayer, the hope, the power, the life. Song is the best expression and interpreter of a regiment. With it a regiment goes into battle, with it the soldier fights; it gives him courage and force, it intoxicates him, and defends him, and with it he *dies*.

Really there is something strange in my people, which I have scarcely seen in other nations, something so powerful, so truly beautiful, pure, and ideal, that it can be expressed by only one language, the language of song. Because of that, song is always on

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a Serbian's lips; he speaks with it, he expresses with it the desires of his heart for beauty and liberty. And the soldiers are the fathers and brothers defending this beauty and liberty. Perhaps this is why every Serbian regiment has its own song.

"My wonderful people!" exclaimed Bora, who was sitting beside me at the door, trembling with emotion. He was a student sergeant, our little boy, the youngest in my company, with rosy cheeks and innocent eyes, which, up to this time, had looked upon the world seeking only beauty. Now they were filled with tears.

"Yes, my wonderful people!" said Spale. "Thy wonder is song! They have chosen song to be their ideal aim of life, their teacher, and most powerful help. The Serbian people know the power of song. In their simplicity they say, 'Song has supported us; to it, our gratitude.' Yes, songs strengthened us through the centuries of Turkish slavery; songs have given to us liberty; songs have opened to us the wide gate of a happy future; songs have avenged Kossovo, and made free

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our brothers. Those songs are living in the fields, forests, and mountains; they are living in the breast of the Serbian nation. That is why we are still alive. And now there is need of the whole of Krupp's Kultur, all the Mephistophelian philosophy, all the devilish schemes, Shwaba's legions, millions of 'brothers,' hunger, thirst, horrors, and everything imaginable, to destroy this song. But, so help me God, these legions and millions, ten to one, can destroy, kill, and crush into the dust everything but one, and this is Serbian song. When our whole regiment shall be destroyed, its song will hover over its ruins, and with its wonderful power, its might of eternal life, create again a new life, a new future."

Thus spoke a Serbian, and the thunder of the song which had overcome the rattling of the cars, was the best proof of the truth of his words.

But the train, paying no heed to these ideal moments, sped on, carrying us to a cold and terrible reality.

* * *

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When we reached Pirot, war had not yet been declared, for the diplomats were still fighting. It was a contest full of shame, for the Bulgarians had no fundamental reason why they should declare war — no reason which would be sensible in the eyes of the honest world. Certainly the Bulgarians had a very difficult position in this struggle, one to which they were not accustomed. Only two years before they had attacked the Serbians, their allies of yesterday, without a diplomatic struggle or declaration of war. Two years ago, knowing that they had no reason, nor weapons with which to fight diplomatically, — which is the first condition of democratic existence, — and fearing to come as men in the full light of God in an honest battle, they chose a third way, the way of hyenas and serpents, by which the “Tsar-Coburg” had ordered his “courageous children” to attack the Serbians in a dark night.

Moreover, that the vile thing might be complete and perfect, the Bulgarian officers dined with the Serbians that same night, sharing their bread, while in their pockets

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was the written order for this attack. A real dinner of Judas Iscariot in this twentieth century! At that time they could do this, for the thing was of an "entirely local nature," and, besides, Austria was back of them.

But *now* it was quite different. Now the thing was not of a "local nature"; now the truth was not hidden by the "darkness of the Balkans" and the "Ballplatz of Vienna," from the eyes of the rest of the world, but, on the contrary, to-day the eyes of an Argus looked upon the Balkans. Now they had to have a reason with which a brother could tear out the brotherly heart; they had to have a real basis for war, an ultimatum, a breaking of diplomatic relations, a regular declaration of war; for the time of darkness, of Attila and Alaric had gone. Alas! scarcely two years! And in a terrible need for a fundamental reason, Coburg, the son of a Teutonic tribe, invented it in an ingenious manner. It was Macedonia!

In 1913 Macedonia was the reason for war. But at that time Bulgarian diplomacy did not dare to fight honestly with this weapon, for

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we were all too familiar with this thing. The Bulgarians knew very well that Macedonia, for them, meant only a good bite with which they could satisfy their megalomaniac appetite. But for the Serbians Macedonia meant everything, past and future, creator of the Serbian State, work of Serbian efforts, cradle of glory and song, — in one word, Serbia's soul. When Bulgaria, then, did not dare to fight with this weapon among the Balkans, now, among strangers, believing in the power of lies, they courageously put it on the green table.

Deceit is an element of Bulgarian character. Even in 1913, the dupes, foul and paid scholars among the Coburg, had tried with all their strength to prove that Macedonia by ethnographic reasons should be Bulgarian.¹

¹ In February of 1913 the Bulgarian Academy printed a brochure, a protest against the Serbian political and military control over the Macedonian inhabitants, who by ethnographic reasons were Bulgarians, and as such were antagonized by the Serbians. The 9th of May, 1913, Mr. Stojanovich, the secretary of the Serbian Royal Academy, sent to all foreign academies, societies, and libraries a declaration of a plenary assembly of the academic members, seeking, by scientific proofs, to overthrow the reasons of the Bulgarian Academy and to declare them false. The declaration is ended: if the

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This lie did not help them before the Serbians and other Slavs. Now they are trying the same before the strangers. What a foul thing! What misery! A spirit full of slavish ambition, the spirit which distinguishes the Bulgarian nation! But those strangers were the Serbian allies, who, fighting together for the same thing, knew themselves very well, and especially their souls. And the Serbian soul was just this Macedonia, which the Bulgarians are asking for themselves: a slavish spirit asks for the Serbian soul! "The strangers" had quickly seen the truth and with it illumined the Bulgarian lies. But the "Bulgarian Tsar" did not care for this, and the Bulgarian nation, as I have said, is a slave, a blind horse, which this Teuton, by an old custom of the tribe, drives with Gessler's spurs, despised even by their great Schiller.

In these critical moments, the Allied diplomats associated with the Serbian diplomats, realizing the imperative need of Ser-

Serbian Royal Academy should enter into political discussion about Macedonia, it would protest against her separation from Serbia for much more important reasons than ethnological ones.

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bia's independence, had continued even against their will this ugly, miserable fighting, offering to their adversary indescribable sacrifices — quite the half of the Serbian soul. But Ferdinand “remains cold” (for there was no question about the soul, but about the heart of Serbia, about Nish, the aim of the European war) and the Bulgarian people still remained blind, for — oh, shame! — among them will never be born a William Tell. And seeing that in Sofia everybody was bowing low before the Teutonic hat, Ferdinand, encouraged by this “veneration,” took the decisive step; he recalled his ambassador from Serbia.

While this unique and most memorable struggle of all history was going on, the Serbian people were not sitting with folded arms. Knowing the Bulgarian people very well, by most bitter experience, they knew that this diplomatic contest was in vain. They felt that the Bulgarians would attack them, and on the third side, in spite of such tremendous sacrifices. Therefore, they bravely began another struggle, a struggle very heavy, very

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painful, and quite impossible — the struggle with nature. When the Serbian people saw that it was impossible to make the defending wall of their breasts on a front of more than eight hundred miles (at that time Serbia had scarcely three hundred thousand soldiers), they tried with all their power to prepare nature to help them. Under the guidance of their General Staff, the whole Serbian nation became workmen with picks and shovels, endeavoring to perform this superhuman task. The hills were destroyed and made new, the century-old stones were crushed and piled, the most terrible peaks were climbed, and the deepest precipices were explored, the forests were cut down, the fields were slashed with endless trenches, the old roads were destroyed and new ones built, the rivers were ordered where to run: and all this to be done in a time impossible to imagine — in three weeks. Yet, while doing this Herculean work, by which the hands became bloody and the body broken by exhaustion, the Serbian people still sang. They sang for this gigantic task to be done, and for their heart and for their soul

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— for Nish and Macedonia. And with the strokes of picks, shovels, and axes, through this beautiful, romantic nature, over these mountains and valleys, echoed the song. To their dear poetry the Serbians added the last pages: their regimental songs.

* * *

When my regiment arrived at Pirot, the whole Second Army was there. More than sixty thousand men in a little town! A real hive! A hive full of industrious bees, which, under a certain devilish rule (this strange effect will be noticed in the New World Encyclopædia under the name of “Pan-Germanism”), had put on one side their old job, making honey, and had taken up a new one, that of sharpening their stings. Through the wide-open doors of large storehouses streamed a flood of picks, shovels, saws, axes, lumber, carried in their arms, or piled on big wagons, on little donkeys and horses, and taken in all directions, to all points, in order to make from the comb, poison, and from poetry, thunder! Such was the time. Everything

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was changed. The perfume of flowers became asphyxiating gas; the rivers, blood; the woods, "forests of dead"; the bowels of the mountains, horrors; the fields, "lands of tears"; the cemeteries were places without boundaries, for they were everywhere; the churches were objects for sacrilege; the artist became a cripple; man became an animal; love was gone; and the nation was ashes. The question is, Who was guilty? The encyclopædia of the future will explain.

My regiment got orders to fortify the positions on the left side of the town and on the right slopes along the Nishava River — a big space which reaches from Basarski-Kamen to the Bulgarian frontier, and from Strashna-Chooka to Batooshin. First of all, my company had to fortify the mountains around Tser-Tser, a gigantic mountain which cut the clouds.

On the 25th of August, just before evening, my company came to the foot of Tser-Tser. Our captain had chosen for our camp a beautiful little green valley edged by the old wild-pear trees, through which a joyful little moun-

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tain brook murmured and sang, and from which we could start every morning in all directions, as required, to dig trenches, fortify peaks, and make roads. With astonishing rapidity the tents were set in four straight lines, and very soon the blue smoke rose from the end of the valley where the cooks were preparing the dinner.

Immediately the captain called Spale, who was in my company as a commander of the second platoon; Cheda, a sergeant, a common peasant, but an excellent man and an old warrior, the commander of the third platoon; Trailo, also a sergeant and peasant, a wild man, coming from the wildest and most mountainous part of Serbia, but a real hero, the commander of the fourth platoon; and me, the commander of the first platoon, to climb with him to the top of Tser-Tser, there to give us instructions, for we had no time to lose. Bora, who was only a simple sergeant in my platoon, came along with us, for it was customary to make all company consultations with him, as he was a student, an intelligent boy, our friend in time of peace,

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and, after all, we were so used to his smile, joke, laughter, and eternal song.

My God! I shall never forget the picture which revealed itself to our eyes when we got to the top. From this tremendous height, this beautiful pure evening, the vision could penetrate very, very far, and thought fled even to the sky. The sun, a glorious flaming ball of ruby, sank slowly behind the Rtan Mountain, whose gigantic rest can be seen from nearly all parts of Serbia. It seemed to me as if the sun had stopped for a moment on the strong centuries-old shoulder of Rtan and whispered something to him. And he, old watchful giant, the sentinel of this country, filling his deep wrinkles and caverns, on which are written the traces of the national history, with the rosy radiance of the sun, smiled, for sweet were the words the sun had whispered to its beloved one. And everywhere around were high peaks and crests, white, bare, and stony, upon which the joyful gleams were dancing, hesitating to leave them, intoxicated by this endless space. Between those peaks and crests wound in all direc-

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tions the deep and blue valleys, through which the white rivers, dashing against the gray rocks, were running in one direction, while in the opposite the stream of waves of rosy radiance were fleeing like the spirits of happiness.

And everywhere, in this beautiful nature, a divine artist had mingled the blue of sky and mountains with the red and rosy hues of the sun, and had made a wondrously tender violet ocean, which, like a good mother, embraced this whole land in a long, long kiss.

Beneath our feet spread uncountable hills and peaks, which were connected by warm old forests and little green meadows and valleys, like a charming beautiful rug woven by the golden hands of an innocent girl in her dream of love. Paths and roads over these hills and valleys stretched like threads of silk; and the little villages, with their white stone roofs, clung to these hillsides like the nests of swallows. And the sweet breeze, wafted over, carried a rich and ravishing perfume on its joyous wings from these warm valleys, these gigantic peaks and crests, and from the blue

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azure, the perfume of song and flowers, the soul of this land. A white flock moved slowly along a green hillside going toward a blue valley. A cheerful, happy sound of little bells floated to this side.

"Is this the truth or is it a dream?" exclaimed Bora.

"Both, my little one," said Spale, trembling with emotion and looking with his artistic eyes upon this magnificent picture.

The mischievous wind played with his dark hair, the ends of which gleamed with the rosy radiance of the sun. His eyes glittered with a strange light.

"Yes," he continued, "this is the truth of a wonderful dream, which will be too short! These must be terrible men who gather from all sides, like wild beasts, to destroy this truth, the truth of the happiness of a good nation, this beautiful dream, this rare picture."

"Why?" exclaimed Bora angrily. "Majko moja! The other nations preserve and defend the works of their artists in museums as the most precious and holy things, and now those same nations are hastening to destroy

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this picture, this dream, this happiness, the ideal life of a nation, a god's work!"

"Don't be scared, Bora. We are here to prevent this, and to defend," said the captain with a pained smile. He, too, was much moved, and he, too, saw this beauty and felt the terrible sin which was to be committed in this modern time. Suddenly he started, came back to reality, and folded his maps, saying: —

"Come on, comrades, to make our 'museum' in which we will preserve *our* art. Now . . . where are we? Ah, here. You see that hill there, and that other beside it, Zlateech, Sedlance, and Mali-Tser; the trenches will be long enough to take in two platoons, facing that valley there, so that the fire wipes . . ."

Oh, irony! From a dream into an icy reality; from a paradise to a hell! Yes, very soon the thunder will burst here; a storm will be raging; the stones will be smashed; the shrapnel will whisper; the shells will explode everywhere; the forests will burn; the black smoke will envelop everything; the houses will be leveled; everything will be shaking, falling,

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crackling, melting into the dust; blood will run; there will be killing with teeth. Yes, on this place will a nation be destroyed.

After an hour we went slowly down to the camp. I turned my head to look for the last time on the picture. Darkness was falling. Yet the west still burned magnificently, and Rtan, there so far, far, was still smiling happily. The valleys had darkened, and across them stretched the white, rosy, and violet fog like a vast web. Little red lights glittered here and there in the villages and from the roofs the white smoke peacefully rose and mingled with the fog. Our camp looked very small from this height, the tents like children's toys, placed by a good boy on a nice green table. A bright sound of music, laughter, and song came up from the camp. Song! Do you understand this people? On the eve of their death, on the eve of the day when they must become murderers, they sang.

* * *

Ten days after this heavy painful work we finally came to the village of Rjana, only two

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miles from the frontier, the place which my regiment must defend. Rjana was quite at the end of a wide, undulating valley, which from Basarski-Kamen dropped for eight miles down to the frontier. It looks like a great flume. On one side rose terrible Strashna-Chooka, a twisted and broken chain of rocky mountains, and on the other, Veedlich, a wonder of nature, a mighty wall of granite more than four thousand feet high, which went from Basarski-Kamen far into Bulgaria. In the middle of this wall was a pass from the valley, a natural endless stair, called Odorovskee-Prelaz. Above Veedlich was an enormous plateau, Batooshin, with on one end Golemi-Vrh, a peak more than eight thousand feet in height.

Toorsko-Leevaje, the name of the valley, was the key of Basarski-Kamen, the gate of Nish. I do not need to speak of the importance of this position. My regiment was proud because it had for its task the defense of it. Two battalions, the first and third, of my regiment (the Fifteenth) had fortified the position at Strashna-Chooka, the second was

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in the reserve of the division, and mine, the fourth, had to defend the valley itself. At the end of the valley, behind the village just facing the frontier, two hills rose between the sides of the flume. One of them was Tzarev-Vees, a perfect geometrical cone, and the other, Dobra-Glava, like the gray bald head of a good-minded old man. The first one had the first company and Dobra-Glava got my second company. Just across the middle of the forehead of this poor old one we dug three trenches — the last work of the bees, after which they will use their stings.

During the time we worked for defense and fortification we heard no news. It was quite impossible to get it. Being far from the whole world, in the company of these century-old stones, we heard other news than that about the war and politics. But once in a while, Juck, the commander of the equipment train of my regiment, who went often to Pirot for supplies, brought the "news": the "news of *komora*,"¹ which was, by long experience, always the subject of jokes and laughter, and

¹ Commissary equipment train.

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beforehand declared "to be too much salt." Yet in the evening, after the heavy work was done and we were gathered around the fire, usually eating cooked wild pears, we liked, for a joke's sake, to have Julock tell us his "very important news." He would squat down beside us, speaking in a low and serious voice.

"The Russians are crossing the Black Sea on a hundred galleons. The French are as ants in Salonika. The Bulgarians have killed Ferdinand; true, so help me God. The Kaiser himself came to Zemlin to encourage his soldiers who do not dare to attack us any more." And three hundred other items of "important news" of this sort. The soldiers listened to him seriously. We would sometimes smile bitterly, and Spale, beside the fire, would sketch this interesting "press bureau" a hundred times over.

When we came to Rjana, where were the staff of the regiment, the hospital, telegraphic and telephonic departments, we heard the truth. Belgrade had been attacked. The Austro-Hungarian armies had

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crossed the Dreena and the Sava, and the Germans the Danube.

"Now the end begins," said Bata, whom we had not seen for more than two weeks, as he was in another company, and the companies were separated and dispersed in all directions.

"Why end? They will kill me and you, for they are ten to one, and they will destroy everything we have built for a hundred years; but our children will remain to build again. This is law," said a captain, father of five little children, slowly and seriously as a man who has made up his mind.

"Ten to one!" exclaimed Bora. "Ho, Boga mu! I am just happy, for I have my twenty years and can experience why a man is man!"

"Very cheap experience, indeed, boy: only a little piece of lead!" The major, commander of my battalion, tried to make a joke.

"Major, I must not pay in the very first moment, and the certain number of these moments have the worth of this price," said Bora, blushing.

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“You’ll be happy if you pay just at the very first,” said my captain slowly with a tired and bitter smile.

A singular man! Certainly I shall never meet such a man again in my lifetime. He was young and very handsome with a noble manner. During the Turkish war, at the siege of Skadar, he contracted pneumonia which soon turned into tuberculosis. And, just when he intended to resign from the army after the Turkish war, the Bulgarian came. He went again to the war and his health became worse. After the war, he went to Switzerland to seek a cure. One year after, finding that it was hopeless, he intended to resign, but again, the same game of destiny — this war came. And this real hero and nobleman of democratic soul again led his company. Now, in the hopeless misery of his health and in the perfect love of his country, he had only one aim, to be killed. But his bad destiny continued; he was the most unhappy creature under the sky; not even his cap had been pierced! At this moment, speaking to this young and healthy boy, bubbling over with

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youth, he thought from his own sad point of view.

Bora understood him and looked at him with a long, pitiful, and tender glance.

Two days after, when we had dug the trenches where we were to remain, we spent our first night in them, sitting close to each other on a pile of fresh hay. Spale and I did not sleep, but we looked up at a piece of the sky full of stars, and listened to a strange noise, a shivering noise which passed through the earth and which could not be heard on the surface. They had begun at one end to destroy this land, and its pain, its last super-human effort for existence, its shuddering from agony and horrible wounds, its last dying quiver passed through its whole body. The dreadful detonations around Belgrade could be heard even at Pirot.

“It is hell ‘there,’” whispered Spale, thinking of Belgrade.

I wished to make answer to him, but I could not, because a black and dreadful thought had crushed my nerves and whole being.

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The next night we heard no more noise. Around midnight, just as Spale had returned from patrol duty, tired, and had lain down beside me to rest, Julock's head appeared above the trench, hiding the stars.

"Are you there, Lieutenants?" he asked in a whisper.

"What is it?" I asked him.

"They have taken Belgrade, and now have entirely destroyed it," he said with a changed voice, and I felt that he spoke the truth.

As if somebody had struck me terribly on the head, suddenly the stars were gone and I felt an unendurable physical pain in my breast: my mother was there.

* * *

The days were passed in idleness. As everything was done (we were really ready to die), so during the whole day we laid in the sunshine between the warm stones, like lizards. During the night we were at the "dead sentinel," awake and watchful, for we had paid dearly for our experience two years ago.

While I was lying on this height of Dobra-

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Glava, in a sea of sunshine and air, I looked around me, and the objects aroused my thoughts. Strange thing, this life. There is something wrong in it! These hills and valleys are quite the same as those over the boundary. The chain of Strashna-Chooka, which reaches far, far into Bulgaria, is just the same as here. This valley runs toward the blue horizon, like a river, always the same: the same air, the same houses, the same men who speak quite the same language, the same sun, the same sky, the same God, and yet there, as here, the trenches are growing with strange rapidity. Man before man, neighbor and brother, are standing and looking upon each other shivering with hatred. From that side there, which is the same as this side here, death is coming! Why? Because there is a German nobleman "Tsar." Because he is a member of a certain group of men (with a sounding name, nobility or aristocracy) who, through the centuries, have held the nations in slavery and have "ruled."

But through the long chain of years, with the help of science, love, and natural laws,

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the nations began to move, to open their eyes, and, brightened by the force of their individuality, to grow strong in the power of their free existence and right to liberty. More cultured nations (with a "simple" name, democrats) had noticed this injustice, the impossibility of their position in the time in which they were, much earlier (two centuries) than the others, and with their power, right, and will they have lighted the torch of their idea.

After long struggles, travail, terrible sacrifices (deep was the root of this poisonous aristocratic plant), and with a flood of their own blood they washed away the old régime (the most brilliant part of American and French history). The nations less cultured, although strong, remained still in this shameful position.

The group of men, the German aristocrats, to which this "Tsar" belongs, seeing this "movement," grew seriously frightened. They were secure in their flock of *Bürgers* and *Meister Sängers*, for they know they are useful only for the innocent "beauty" of their poetry

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(certainly not able to accomplish the work of *sans-culottes*). Yet they were frightened by "influences" from outside. Not entirely without reason; for some of these good Meister Sängers, especially those who were closer to the "influence," would "rhyme" something "new" (oh! only in a little *liederchen*). In order to kill this "disastrous thing," more than half a century ago one of their first men, leader, hero, and star, from the high pedestal of his political glory had exclaimed to the German people in thrilling and patriotic advice: "Nuhr nicht viel resonieren!"

In other words: "Shut up! and be what you are, slave and blind tool": the tool to preserve aristocracy. But the expression of modern time ran with "devilish speed" and the influence, in spite of everything, had its effect. (Who ever saw such a "low and ugly" thing as socialism is?)

So, before the end of the last century the head of this group (it would be very long and tiresome if I were to try to write the title of Kaiser Wilhelm), at the very threshold of his rule, asked himself very seriously: To be,

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or not to be? And the answer of this almighty one was, indeed: To be. But how? "If I am chosen, if I am to remain," said this man one day in a divine inspiration, kneeling before the tomb of Christ in Jerusalem, "if I am to rule over the world in Thy name, O Lord, I have to kill the 'influence'!"

Again the question, How? This "influence" is the expression of the idea of democracy of the whole world. It was the idea of a divine right of the people which was spreading everywhere. This idea has to be destroyed if the Kaiser Wilhelm II and his posterity want to rule. Therefore, at a secret assembly of German nobility (quite a noble gesture) which this leader had gathered forty years ago, the way was found in which they could destroy the "influence," in other words, the democracy of the whole world.

From that time began a tremendous systematic work, the work of making a gigantic engine which will save the aristocracy. Certainly this work was tremendous, for those creatures, although morally dead, yet were endlessly powerful in money and connections.

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The programme of this secret assembly was partially this: —

First, the reformation inside: the tool has to be well sharpened. So these noblemen, not with too great painstaking, have taught the German people to say every morning, like a parrot: “Ich kann, also ich muss.”¹ Every people, which is united, is strong, so it “can.” And certainly the German people “must,” for this is an old, old tradition which becomes, nowadays, a “modern-political” habit. In order to hinder every wrong explanation of this device, the Kaiser had tirelessly thrown in the eyes of his people the patriotic dust of the German Pan-Germanism: “Deutschland über alles!” During those forty years of preparation the tool was well sharpened in the hands of this noble master.

Second; the organization outside. They married their belles (certainly a pure-blooded nobility) to the neighboring czars, emperors, and kings. (This gift of pure-blooded nobility has cost the Russian nation four millions killed.) These “dames” do not go without

¹ *I can, so I must.*

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escorts, so they took with them a flood of barons, counts, teachers, professors, musicians, generals, and politicians. Every one of these had his personal, public duties and one secret which was common. Thus the "influence" was against the "influence."

Third, reorganization outside. They sent their members (by a modern political rule and "cultural prestige") to foreign countries to be kings and "rulers." Ferdinand, a splendid member, was sent to Bulgaria. The German scholars had discovered a peculiar equality, the "Bürger" was the same as "petchalbar" — the tool was equal. So Ferdinand's duty was easy: to preserve the Bulgarian people just as they are up to a given moment, and during all this time to sharpen them (Bragalnitza was the best whetstone). Only here the "dust" was "Velikata Blgarska" instead of Pan-Germanism. The ruin of Serbia proves that Ferdinand has accomplished his task gloriously.

And thus this engine was built and perfected. On account of their cowardice and vileness, it was necessary that this engine re-

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main a secret until it was complete and ready to move. Hence, a new dust must be found to throw into the eyes of all the world. This dust was German "Kultur," German trade, and German industry, all under the protection of "Deutsches Volks-Bank," whose largest shareholder was Kaiser Wilhelm.

In 1908 the engine was finished. In order to test its efficiency, the late Emperor, Franz Josef, the second head of the aristocratic union, announced the annexation to his Empire of Bosnia and Herzegovina, two of the most democratic countries. This test of the secret engine was again secret, hidden under the simple business of an "honest" buyer and an "honest" seller. Europe was silent. Then the Kaiser had the happiest smile in his life. "Why, these foolish 'plebs' do not understand a nobleman!" he said one day to his friends, looking at the brilliant success of the test of the secret engine.

In 1914 it was decided to make the general movement of the engine: for two reasons — first, that the secret should not be discovered (the reason was the new French and Russian

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military law); and second, that the engine itself should not get rusty. But now arose a question: Should the engine be moved openly or secretly? For, although they were sure of the solidity and endurance of their engine, although the tears were running from the eyes of the German people because of the Pan-Germanic dust, yet these noblemen were scared, lest in the case of failure ("Oh, God forbid it!") they should come to the prisoner's dock. They knew that it would not be war between states and states, but the war of Pan-Germanism against the whole world, the war of idea against idea, the war of tyranny against liberty, the war of democracy against aristocracy. They knew how very dangerous it was, but it was the only way to save their noble lives (up to this time the cost had been only half a dozen million of human lives). They knew how great a world-tragedy it would be, for which a reason must be found. On that account the question, — openly, as noblemen, or secretly, as cowards, to find a "reason" for this world-tragedy? They decided, secretly. Now they need a reason.

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Where is it to be found? The democracy, all around, had lived a happy life in liberty.

Finally the diplomats at Ballplatz and Potsdam ingeniously invented the reason. It was ingenious, simple, and natural: a democrat must kill a member of their society whom they will avenge by smashing the democracy. But where to find a victim among them, and where a murderer? The victim was the less important thing (for they are so many). The chief thing was, where to find a murderer, and the place of the murder? Where will it be? Certainly in Serbia, that little country, their greatest hindrance, that pearl of the Slavs, that "wild people," that "democratic rag," that gate of the East, that undying force, that little worm which is gnawing at the great tree. Now comes the height of aristocratic wildness. Neither had their aristocrat known that he was to be killed, when they sent him to Serajevo, nor the little democrat known, when he pointed his pistol bravely at the breast of the nobleman, that it was the hand of the aristocrat which guided him (poor Prinzip died in a terrible prison when he saw whose

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tool he had been). And here the good old experience had helped, the experience acquired in the use of the "dust." The dust which was thrown in the eyes of this poor boy was "Veleeka Srbija." The future member of this new, young, and democratic state had killed the nobleman, the future ruler of an old aristocratic state.

After the murder, fire, crying, consternation, regrets and tears . . . then Serbia was called to the prisoner's dock. Haughty, swollen, disdainful, the Teuton aristocracy had dragged in by the collar the "ragged, miserable beggar." And without waiting for a trial they hastened to smash the worm. Austria declared war upon Serbia. And booming, thundering, shaking, the engine began to move.

Then Europe struck her forehead. The nations started and began to think. Serbia? Wait . . . that little country which was enslaved for five centuries? That place where liberty was the most glorified? This nation which was born democratic? The creator of democratic hymns? And now they want to de-

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stroy it? The reason? Ah . . . and all honest states hastened in defense of Serbia. And democracy, in its power, met face to face the aristocracy. Thus the world war began. In his "burg" before the map of the world, the Kaiser said spitefully: "Die, rag! For a nobleman is born to rule over this world."

But the "rag" became legion, noble defenders of their noble idea, and the little worm became a giant. And, after one year of work by the Kaiser's engine, "the worm" still moved, this democratic nest had still borne its little ones, Serbia still lived. And in his rage, feeling his failure, the Kaiser, with his "chosen people," exclaimed one day with incomparable brutality: "Zerschmette den Wurm!"¹

Ferdinand bowed, and used his tool.

Now, because of that, from this same side, from these same hills and valleys, from this same people, from brothers, from Bulgaria, death is coming.

Oh, brother, brother! My unhappy blind brother, have you thought about the future?

* * *

¹ Smash the worm!

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I did not like this life of inaction, because we had too much time for such thoughts, the thoughts which every honest man despises, and by which a Serbian becomes insane, or is killed.

Finally, after a few days of this mental pain, at eleven o'clock before noon, the 12th of October, the order was read that war had been declared. The Bulgarians, taking the other knife from their teeth, had openly avowed for the first time: "Die, brother!" (Many and many of God's creatures of this land had whispered, "Thank you.") Seeing that the Germans and Austrians are really progressing, that they have already taken Belgrade, Shabatz, Smederevo, Pojarevatz, that the Teutonic iron and steel — the best product of their culture — had encircled Serbia on two sides, the Bulgarians hastened to fill in on the third side. Easy job, gentlemen? Goethe and Vassov had written about this?

Just as we went back to the trenches after this order was read to us, Spale pulled at my sleeve.

"Strange thing!" he said, laughing.

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"What?" I asked seriously, for I was in no mood for joking.

"Imagine this was the overture of an opera . . ."

"Certainly a beautiful piece!"

"All depends on the composer! But, anyway, it is already played. Now the curtain is rising. On the stage Mephistopheles, Faust, and Marguerite . . ."

"And the new writer of this old libretto?"
I fell in, against my will.

"Old Goethe . . ."

"Goethe?"

"Excuse me, I have to explain. The genius of Goethe knew the German people. He knew that the whole psychology of the Teutonic tribes was Mephistophelian philosophy. For at the very beginning of his work he had, in a letter written to his sister (certainly in French), asked himself very seriously, should he become 'en diogen'? And later, he made one of his most exact conclusions: my people are wild, culture will make them crude. In order to hinder that, he wrote his 'Faust,' the work, which through the long chain of years

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has interested the brain of the whole world, which sought an explanation: the European war has come to give one of the most correct. As I have said, Goethe had known the Mephistophelian spirit of the German nation, and feeling its disastrous power, he, the good teacher, wrote 'Faust,' as the best example of the horror. The Teutons, haughty and foolish, born with this devil, have taken Goethe's work as the way. This way has brought them to this day, to the stage of which the Kaiser is the manager. The Teutonic nation is Mephistopheles, Bulgaria, Faust, and the Democracy, Marguerite (on this stage, Serbia). Beautiful cast! Eh! Dissatisfied with the 'weak' Gounod, the Kaiser gave the libretto and baton into the hand of Krupp. Look out, Mr. Leader is holding that little baton in the air. 'The opera will begin any minute,' ended Spale, laughing.

I looked at him. How fine and handsome this man was! The speaking face, burned by the sun and wind, expressed his unique spirit, will, and energy. The beautiful, dreamy eyes full of love and all his flexible, perfect figure

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bursting forth with youth, strength, and life. How I loved this friend of mine! I loved his keen thought, his vivid, powerful spirit, his divine art, his golden heart, his youth, his whole life, his friendship.

God! If he be killed? again darted through my head. More than a hundred times this thought returned to my brain with still more and more torture.

Although from the time we came to the trenches we were watchful, although our guns were always ready standing in the loopholes, orders now came that we must not sit down. The soldiers, leaning against the walls of the trench, looked silently through the holes.

Beginning! Is this land really beginning to perish? And help? Seven days ago, after the terrible night when Belgrade had fallen, the happiest news came to us with the rising of the sun. The French were coming! Nish was decorated with French and Serbian flags in their honor. The whole country shouted in happiness. Serbia was proud and dignified, for she took France to her heart. The word came that the first regiments would take positions

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around Pirot. We were foolish with happiness. Are the sons of our other country really coming here? Here, beside us? "Poilu" beside the Serbian "ratnik"! Oh, my God! It would be too good! Really will the spirit of the "Marseillaise" rhyme with the Serbian poetry? Really are the sons of Robespierre, Danton, Camille Desmoulins, — are the sons of Victor Hugo and Béranger really coming to the Serbian barricades? The grenadiers from Wagram and Austerlitz? It seemed to us that already we heard the magnificent and thunderous hymn which shakes the hoary mountains: "Allons, enfants!" It seemed to us that already we saw their thick columns coming down the Toorsko Livadje with a tremendous cheering: "Aux armes mes citoyens!" We felt already the clasp of their manly hands, their power, friendship, and love, and the poilu's words spoken in his way sounded already in our ears: "Nous les aurons, quand-même!" We shivered with emotion and happiness. Our hearts were bursting from our breasts, and our whole being poured out: "Vive la France!"

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Now, alone, silently we were waiting for our tragedy. A bitter pride, a steely manliness, a foolish pleasure, and an irresistible desire for death were in the midst of this black destiny. Yet some of the soldiers would tremble with hope, for still the words are being whispered: "The French are coming! The French are coming!"

About one o'clock in the afternoon, somewhere in the distance, from the left side, booming began. Then, immediately, from the right. From this moment the booming came nearer, more distinct, harsh and terrible firing. Soon, it seemed to me as if all the devilish powers were making the effort to break down the gates of hell. Then our cannon stormed thunder. The earth shook, the air was filled with crashing. The fire, steel, and hatred are creeping along every ridge of this land.

At two o'clock in the afternoon the first cannon turned toward our positions. The raging and whistling shells flew against Strashna-Chooka, crashing the stones which rolled into the valley. Waiting for a long time for the

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delight of the first shots, our artillery (two batteries which were far behind our trenches) began to fire. The shells flew over our heads with hissing speed. Oh, good old sound! In the beginning, like a thunderous *oo*, and then more and more thin, finally to end in a weak boom. The Bulgarian artillery tried to find ours: an opposing *oo* with thunder at its end. Soon it became a general chaos of the air.

"They think to make a short job!" said Cheda coolly.

"At least they are hoping!" I said, shivering with emotion in those first moments of battle.

After half an hour of this dreadful booming, suddenly a thick black smoke arose behind a green hill far in the valley, then a powerful detonation.

"Bravo! Ours have set fire in their ammunition wagon," exclaimed the soldiers laughing.

The Bulgarians, in revenge, doubled their fire: now with a better method. One part was directed on our position and Tzarev-Vrh, and the other kept up its rapidity, still seek-

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ing our battery. It began to grow serious. The soldiers drew their heads down into their shoulders, bowed and grasped their guns convulsively. The shells were exploding everywhere around the trench.

Yet through this booming we heard distinctly, dry and clear-cut, uncountable, *tek, tek, tek*.

“Our advance post is firing. The Bulgarians are attacking! Look out!” exclaimed Cheda.

I ran to the captain who had chosen my trench to be in during the battle because it was in the middle. At this moment he was speaking over the telephone with our advance post, which was within five hundred metres of our main position: —

“From the right side of the village? Good. In case of need you will retreat as I said.”

I looked over the parapet. Nothing but smoke was to be seen. The firing of our advance post had doubled. The captain did not look away from this side. Suddenly the soldiers began to move, and steady themselves. The captain grasped the telephone.

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“Fourth Battery! Fourth! The direction slanting Rajana, right of the village. Try with thirty-four hundred metres. Hurry.”

When I looked over the parapet again, far into the valley, the slope of the green hill which was level against the sky was now irregular with human beings. Something black and ugly. Something which jumped from bush to stone like a frog.

“Bulgarians!” was shouted here and there.

A minute after, our artillery poured its fire there. The captain with glance fixed upon the valley directed with the telephone. The Bulgarians, in order to assure their attack, had directed all their cannon on our trenches. Horrors! Everything around us was broken, crushed, and smashed. We grew deaf. It seemed as if the earth had lifted into the air. The soldiers began to fall. In the midst of thunder and chaos, human screams more terrible than both. The irregular lines came closer and closer. The new lines at the top appeared and disappeared again and again. Our machine guns began to fire. The air was vibrant, the earth shivered, the walls of the

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trench fell, burying the legs. Everything was boiling. A few minutes later, my captain touched my shoulder and said:—

“It is time!”

I ran to one side of the trench and Cheda to the other. The soldiers, who alone knew the “moment,” were ready.

“Quick firing! Eight hundred metres! Eight hundred . . .”

The heads bowed, the faces showed in the loopholes. They began. It was as if tumult rode on the back of horror.

From this time our guns never grew cold.

* * *

For five days we fought without stopping.

It is impossible to describe those days, where every moment created new wonders, new horrors, new impossibilities, which only at the cost of our own blood were overcome. During the days we were fighting, shooting endlessly, — blinding, deafening, falling, screaming, killing . . . During the night we worked: a feverish work: the work of a soldier and a man, for we were still human beings. In these

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hours of darkness the soldiers with shovels and picks repaired that which was destroyed during the day; then they took out empty ammunition cases and replaced them with full; the broken wires of the telephones were repaired; the seriously wounded soldiers were carried away. Then they helped the men of the machine guns to build new fortifications, for the positions had to be changed each night because of the enemy's artillery. The guns were cleaned by sense of touch. The sentinels of the advance posts were exchanged. And all this without a word, without a sound. There are men who did not speak for five days.

Then we would satisfy all our human needs. When we finished everything, then we would eat. Julock would distribute the loaves of bread and cold meat: this was all. Bowed, sitting close to each other, on the earth of the trench, in darkness, we ate our food without even a knife. One would suddenly grow weak, letting the bread fall from his hand into the dirt. Finally, deadly weariness had conquered the human being. And sitting, with

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face leaning against the wet, rough earth, with open mouth, he would remain there motionless, dead until somebody whispered: "Get up!"

This night, the sixth one since the battle began, again came my turn to go to the advance post, — "dead sentinel" as we call it, — only three hundred metres from the enemy. It is the soldier's sense of smell, the soldier's nerve, which feels the slightest movement of the enemy. In the case of sudden attack at night, the "dead sentinel" dies to save the others.

"Alive, my good one?" I exclaimed to Spale whom I had to replace, and who had been the whole day at the advance post in a terrible battle. I was worried all the afternoon, for at noon the telephone connection was broken, so that we could not get any news, and because of the terrain the little trenches of the advance post could not be seen from Dobra-Glava.

"Alive, certainly!" exclaimed Spale, grasping my hands.

"Who was killed?" I threw out this eternal, painful question.

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“Jare and Speera. Poor men, they were killed last night when they replaced each other in the sentinel’s line, down in that little valley. Although both were very careful, being at the most dangerous place, yet they were killed because of the moonlight. You will see later that it is light as the day. The worst is that ‘they’ *again* will not dare to gather and bury their dead because of that moonlight. The little valley is full of them. To-day they left eleven corpses. As you can see, not the most desirable part of this neighborhood.”

“Not the most. But I do not care, thanks to the old rule of war: the nerves are first killed, and then the body.”

“You are an exception,” said Spale, laughing. Then he looked around and sighed deeply. “Again there will be a beautiful night. How divine are these nights! Just because they are between those horrors . . . but I am on my way. I have to go. Good-bye, and take care of yourself,” he said in a voice full of emotion, pressed for the last time my hand, and went into the darkness. His soldiers crept after him.

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About midnight the full moon shone just over my head, smiling with her bright, good-natured face. I was lying outside the trench in the thick, deep, dry grass. God, what a night! At her parting, the goddess of fruit and autumn, for the last time, kissed the earth with her most beautiful caress. Now there were many tears mingled with this caress. Complete silence reigned. Nothing moved. It seemed to me as if a tender, unseen hand had spread a golden white silken cover over those hills, stones, ruins, corpses, and blood, and, hiding them, had transformed all into a mystic dream of beauty. I was in a waking dream. It was so warm, mild, soft, tender, and sweet. My breast had gratefully taken the fresh, perfumed air after the dust and smoke of the day. My glance wandered over the sky, in which the big stars shone beside the moon, or it sped here and there through the blue-black ether. The little white clouds darted around the moon, covering it playfully, as little children around their grandmother. The river which flowed through the valley murmured a sad mystic air.

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And everywhere around me from the earth there came little sweet notes which mingled in an exquisite hum. The whole of this little uncounted world, which lives in the grass and earth, all of those millions of little beings, frightened by the daily horror, are now whispering, asking themselves, Will it come again? Or, perhaps, they complained and wept for their brothers who were killed. Oh, how beautiful and sweet was the sorrow of this little people! It reminded me of an old Tuscan cloister full of peace, twilight, and perfume, in which hovered the divine organ music. Yes, it was the night for prayer. It seemed to me that all those armies, divided by this beauty of the night, again became individuals, as men silently gazing, they opened their hearts, looked upon the horrors they have made, shivering at the thought that when the day comes they must plunge again into murder and blood.

“Fly in!” Cheda exclaimed again from the trench. “Can you not see that this is like the day? They will kill you like a cat. And that with a stone, it is so near.”

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I did not listen to him. I heard only the word "killed." Killed! Can anybody, in this beautiful night, even think of murder? In this night when heaven has bent so near this earth; in this night, when the soul is full of dreams, and the heart so full of love? This night is created for love and goodness. It is created for confession. When every atom of this gigantic nature is full of goodness and love, then one's heart grows soft, and the confession of a heavy sin could more easily go out from a tortured breast. Yet my thoughts fled far, far into the blue dreams seeking the places which were sometimes the lap of the happiness of life.

Suddenly, in the midst of this silence, this beauty, in the midst of this sweet, tender, chanting music, a voice, a song! A beautiful manly voice on the Bulgarian side is softly and sadly singing a song. My God, a Bulgarian is singing! My whole being, intoxicated by the sweetness of this night, now fell into such an emotion under the influence of this voice, this song, that I became oblivious of place and reality. Slowly I raised myself, sat

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down, and, shivering, I drank in the wonderful tones. What a song! Do I dream? The sweet vibration of the song, tenderly mingling with the music in the atmosphere, overwhelmed me more and more.

Presently the song became stronger, clearer, more passionate, more emotional, a song full of tears which had to come from a martyr's breast.

Then I grasped the words: "Oh, where are you, moments of my happy dreams?"

"La Tosca!" I exclaimed loudly. A Mario in his last moments, in a sea of most dreadful human unhappiness, in darkness, between four walls, feeling the sigh of the dead instead of the embrace of happy love, seeks, with the last shriek of his heart, his happy dreams! The dreams of love! And this Mario now is a Bulgarian! A traitor, murderer! No, no, I cannot believe it! And yet the song hovered constantly, more and more beautiful and more and more sad. It was ringing like a confession, a confession spoken in the most solemn moment of a life in a most touching manner, with the divine language of music, the music

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which moved the most stony heart with emotion.

“What desires this man, this unhappy heart, this Bulgarian?” I asked myself. I felt a powerful struggle which surged more and more through my being. I can never psychologically explain those moments. They were too strong, too sudden, too unexpected. I felt only as if a strange power had risen, with a dreadful right, in my soul, to destroy the song, this confession of a murderer, this sacrilege of the last beauty of a Serbian dream.

“It is not Mario! Lie, lie!” was ringing somewhere around me. And yet my heart, in extremely emotional, painful throbs, drew me toward this voice, this song, this man, mournfully crying: “Brother, brother! Perhaps the only one!”

Something snapped within me, and suddenly, without knowing myself how, under the pressure of a strong bitterness, pain, and sadness, the hopeless answer came from my breast: “And never the moment of happiness will come again!”

When the last notes of the song died, the

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silence of a tomb fell. I did not know myself. Why was I so cruel? Perhaps it was really a brother. The brother who had been waiting for forty years for the Serbian embrace. Perhaps he is the only one who, under the dreadful sin and misery of his nation, under the slavery and unhappiness of his people, in this wonderful night has been awakened by a higher spirit and seeks forgiveness. Forgiveness! Is it possible, is it attainable? His father and his brother will kill *my* mother and sister to-morrow and drag out the Serbian heart. The work has only begun and is not yet finished. When it is done, then perhaps the dead ones, the ruins will forgive . . . then perhaps . . .

“Mà, forgive me, bratko!”¹ came again in the bright and quiet night, so sad and so tenderly. A Bulgarian is begging for forgiveness, freed by the irresistible spirit of this beautiful night. Being freed from Gessler’s claws, the Bulgarian soldier, again a man, a free being, with deadly horror measured the

¹ A national Macedonian song of the allied Serbian and Bulgarian *komitajic*.

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weight of his sin, and so, perhaps, for the first and last time, falls on his knees before the dying people which he had, only a few hours ago, nailed on the cross.

“Forgive me, bratko!” Again those cries fled through the silent night seeking answer. I suffered terribly. Unhappiness, pain, horror gathered slowly in the human heart, crowding it with an indescribable pressure. Yet they do not burn, they do not destroy the soul. For a sudden little moment can create this. In this moment I was now. The song, this spark, had set on fire the unhappiness of my soul. I no longer realized what was happening around me. I entirely forgot the place in which I was. I was standing at full height forgetting my danger. Something drew me forward toward the voice, the song. Here was another unhappy one, and, perhaps, an embrace. My trembling legs made a few steps. Cheda jumped to my side.

“Unhappy one, where? Bulgarian lie!” harshly said this old warrior, whose bitter experience spoke rightly, this unhappy Serbian who knew full well the reality.

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This brought me to my senses. I stooped unwillingly. The song had died away. The beauty of the night had changed into reality, the light of the moon cruelly showed the horror around me, and suddenly I saw clearly the masses of the dead spreading on all sides. The flame of unhappiness which had burned for a moment in my soul had destroyed my feelings. There was left only the thought, the brain, the cold judge who pitilessly tore into the ruins and wounds of a heart.

“Yes, yes, my unhappy brother,” I thought as I looked into this valley of the dead, “the blood between you and me, the blood of our fathers, the black precipice of hate created by the ‘foreign influence,’ does not permit us to embrace each other. Unhappy man! You are more unhappy than myself, for to-morrow when you rejoice over the victory, you will know that you are celebrating it with the price of bought souls, and with an eternal sign of treachery on your forehead before God and men. You will know when you take the Serbian heart in ‘glorious’ victory, you, born democrat, will meet face to face with an aris-

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tocrat, who will throw you on your knees to lick his feet. Miserable brother, I like better my tragedy than your victory.”

Slowly I went down into the trench and remained quiet the entire night with my forehead on my knees. “My only brother!” came often into my mind like a sad shadow. “What a misery of time! Man alone, democrat and brother, in a mass, murderer and slave of aristocrats.”

The next day there was a dreadful battle. At the north Petrovatz had fallen. The Serbians were now attacked directly in the back. The Bulgarians were advancing from Negotin. Their dream of connecting themselves with the Germans was now realized. Intoxicated by this news and with brandy, they made foolish, stormy assaults, sowing persistently the corpses to the glory of the Kaiser. In the morning I had to retreat to the main position. During the day the Bulgarians stormed seven times through the valley and, decimated, fled howling back. Finally, at five o'clock in the evening, the fourth company of my battalion, supported by our fire

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and the machine guns, made an assault and cleared out the whole terrain up to the border. Spale went with soldiers to retake our advance post.

The next night, twenty-four hours after, Spale returned, came to my trench, and gave me a card.

“When we were coming back from our advance post we found an officer who had been killed. His chest was like a sieve from bullets. Beside other things we found his ‘carte de visite.’ ”

I took the card, lit a match, and read: “Mircha Traichev, Cand. Phil. — Paris.”

“France brought him up!” I exclaimed.

“Yes. Certainly he was your brother about whom you told me. Maybe, perhaps, you killed him,” said Spale.

“Maybe,” I scarcely whispered.

* * *

We have been since yesterday in the regiment’s reserve.

The third company had replaced us after eight days of battle. On this occasion we saw

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Bata, who was in that company, and who, when he saw us alive and well, jumped for joy. As much as he was joyful, so we were sad, for now had come the time for him to go down into the "hole."

In that time the reserve was considered a rest. Rest! Should such a word be spoken nowadays? A single company in reserve for a regiment which was spread over a stretch of eight miles! And what a terrain, too! If there is danger for Strashna-Chooka we must run to help for more than six miles over terrible hills of sharp stones and cliffs. And if the Bulgarians, in order to surround my entire regiment, menace Odorovski-Prelaz, the pass of Veedlich, we had to fly right toward the sky; and after such a run immediately go into battle. Beautiful prospect!

Added to all this the rain began to fall, the cold and endless rain of autumn. That night was the last of the fair weather. Among these mountains there is no slow, mild change from summer to winter. Yesterday morning all the peaks around were dressed in white covers. On the heights snow, and in the valley rain.

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Winter! The winter was coming, and its hardships completed the national tragedy. The source of sickness and hunger had opened its crater, pouring its poison over the unhappy ones.

We set up our tents in a small field near the village church. The heavy rain poured unceasingly. One could scarcely move through the deep mud. Added to all our other burdens we had twenty more pounds to carry on our boots after a few steps. The soldiers were sitting under the tents close to each other, in full equipment, with their guns across their laps, for any moment the order might come to go. Or they were gathered around the big kettle in which the cooks had prepared the dinner, or warmed themselves around the fire, breathing the hot steam of the food. They were happy because, perhaps, to-day they will have something hot.

The captain, Spale, and I went inside a near-by house to find shelter from the rain and to "sleep." The house had only one room with an *ogneeshte* — fireplace — in the middle of it. Over the fireplace, a large hole full

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of ashes, was a big dark chimney full of smoked meat. An old woman was sitting in a corner of the fireplace, silent, motionless. Her face was covered with black wrinkles and her bare feet were in the ashes. She was the only protector of the house and sheep (the inhabitants of this mountainous region live exclusively on sheep). The other members of the family, women and children, had fled, and the men were in the military service. The sheep, for there was no one to take them to the pastures, were crowded in the back yard, wet through and through, and steaming from their own heat. They were bleating sadly, seeking their food and liberty.

When we came to the village (Rjana) which the staff of the regiment still occupied, we again heard black news. The Bulgarians had taken Zajechar. Now they were connected with the German armies; both were advancing rapidly, using the parallel strategic flank movements. German cannon and ammunition had been brought to the entire Bulgarian front. The Austrians had taken Rudnik and were menacing Kragujevatz. The people

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were flying from everywhere. Hunger began to manifest itself. Typhus was again raging. Yet our armies were retreating in good order, setting on fire and destroying everything, doing heroic work in order to gain time to allow the people to fly. Where? Destiny replied, when after one month they struck with their foreheads the frozen stones of Albania. The general impression was that the armies around Pirot had to maintain their position at any cost to prevent the armies from the north reaching the same height (Nish), so that the danger of being surrounded would cease. Would we succeed in this?

To-day the Bulgarians had left our positions in peace. For the last two days a great change had been evident in the tactics of the Bulgarians; while before, they were assaulting as if insane, losing their lives like chaff in an attempt to seize Basarski-Kamen through the valley, howling like beasts for this key of the gate of Nish; yet in spite of their wild heroism they had not gained a single foot. Now they left the valley and struck in another way: over Batooshin, to take Odo-

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rovski Pass, surround my regiment, and advancing over Veedlich, hold the whole Second Army in checkmate. It could be seen at once that the German strategists (really the *summa summarum* of their Kultur) were directing the wildness of the foolish Bulgarians. While before, their artillery was a joke to us, now it became perfect. Krupp's pupils were now playing on these instruments. And with these weapons they began to carry out their new plan. The valley was quiet, but at Veedlich, high up toward the sky, there was fury. And sitting beside a fire we looked through the open door at this storm over the white peaks.

"Will the Twentieth Regiment hold out?" Spale broke the silence.

"What's the use?" said Cheda bitterly.

"To get time, fool that you are, to save the other armies and the people. *We* are to be killed," said the captain darkly. He was sitting beside the fire breathing heavily and painfully. Once in a while he coughed. A dreadful rattling, a terrible noise, came from his breast. God! how that man had suffered! When he coughed, the old woman would stir

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a little in her stiffness, lift her head, look upon him long and silently, turn her contorted face toward him with eyes from which the light had gone out. Then she would slowly bow her head and sigh: "Ey! kookoo mene!"

Outside the night began to fall. The rain had doubled in intensity and was raging. At Veedlich the battle still thundered. We were silent, while the fire crackled; its flame made large, mysterious pictures from the shadows on the white walls. The sheep in the back yard bleated more loudly and plaintively. Thus the night passed.

In the morning a thick, icy fog had covered everything. Nothing could be seen anywhere. The rain had ceased, but everything was cold and wet. Sitting beside the kettle waiting for the tea to be ready, we mutely listened to the booming at Veedlich which had not diminished.

"Am I mistaken, or is it really so? The firing is much nearer," said a soldier stamping his feet in the mud.

It seemed the same to me. I could not know the truth, for the captain was in the

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regimental staff. We again grew silent and listened. The firing was really moving closer and closer to the pass. An hour after it was in the same line as our trenches and the valley, only four thousand feet higher.

“What’s the captain doing?” I asked impatiently.

I was worried. I ordered the soldiers, who had drunk their tea, to be ready. They tightened up their cartridge belts, slung their guns over their shoulders, and stood in the mud silently, with their hands in their pockets. The tents remained up, yellow, wet, and sad in the midst of the black mud. Later the firing grew entirely distinct. It seemed to be at the edge of Veedlich.

All of a sudden the captain ran in and exclaimed: —

“Lift them!”

The soldiers ran toward the tents, and in the clap of a hand the tents were pulled down and folded. Wet and stiff the soldiers painfully lifted them on their shoulders.

“What is it, Meele?” I asked the captain who stood quietly, but pale.

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“Simple. Profiting by the fog they have taken Golemi-Vrh. Many positions at Batoshin are surrounded. The Twentieth Regiment is retreating. Our second battalion, which was in the reserve of the division, was sent to help. The situation is dreadful. Hurry up, hurry up! Are you ready? Follow!” cried this man and went as if he were not bearing a terrible sickness in his breast.

The soldiers ran after him, slipping in the mud, and still tightening their equipments. I shall never forget the run through this valley full of small slippery, muddy hills, and the climb up the steep side which lifted toward the sky. The sweat ran from our burning bodies, our mouths parched dry, our tongues swelled, our breath was gone. A hundred times we fell, yet we hurried forward. After an hour and a half we came near the top, near the pass.

The most dreadful thing was, that we knew nothing: neither where the Bulgarians were, nor how far the Twentieth Regiment had retreated. Are the Bulgarians already at the pass? If they *are* there, then the end comes

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for my company, for they could dash us down the precipice with stones; and yet absolutely we had to resist them in order to save our regiment from the jaws of the trap. Luck came when the wind swept away the fog. Again we could see around. As we came closer and closer to the pass, we could hear more distinctly the storm that raged above us.

For a moment it happened that Spale was beside me. We looked at each other. All our life, all our love, all our inseparable friendship, was lying in this glance. In those moments destiny was deciding pitilessly about the life of a human being, the being who loved and was loved the most. What indescribable pain in this farewell of two friends, who for sixteen years had been together, and in whose childish hearts love had taken deep root.

"I feel some terrible thing, my little one!" said Spale, who was bathed in sweat, pale, shivering, and breathing heavily.

"Foolishness! Old fool as you are," I said, trying to joke and smile, although I myself felt a tremendous pain in my breast.

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"No, no, it is not foolishness. I never felt this before when I was going into battle. Something which . . . You see I am all shivering." And he grasped my hand which he pressed convulsively. Then slowly he began to whisper:—

"If I am going to be kil . . ."

"Stop!" I exclaimed, at the limit of my strength.

When we came near to the top, the company halted. The soldiers who remained behind, or had fallen, continued to come up. The captain called to me:—

"Take ten soldiers, go to the top, and see what the matter is. It seems to me that they are not yet at the pass. Be careful."

Ten minutes later I was in front of three gigantic holes, which opened on the plateau of Batooshin. The tremendous rocks reared into the sky, making a fearsome scene. I was trembling. I went ahead from stone to stone, expecting every moment to hear the ugly *chak-chok* whistle raging beside my ear and to see the unkempt head which was laughing behind a stone. But this "pleasure" had not

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happened even when I reached the top. When I first glanced at the endless Batooshin, I exclaimed in joy. On the round plateau stretched a gigantic tongue, made from hills and trenches, whose thicker end was on the Bulgarian side. The tongue was covered with black masses which moved toward its end. Between the pass and the tongue was a large valley with a stream of white stones in the middle of it. In the front of the tip of the tongue were other black masses which moved and arranged themselves in order. And between those black masses, smoke, whistle, booming. From the left side of the pass, from Golemi-Vrh, from the sky, the Bulgarians came down slowly, hiding themselves behind the stones. After a while my captain came, and for a few moments looked around at the situation.

“Why, that is not at all so bad. And I had thought that we should fly at each other’s throats right away! Now, two platoons to remain here and open fire immediately at Batooshin. Those from Golemi-Vrh are dangerous. You will go for them with two other platoons. You know . . . to-day is the chance

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... where is the telephone?" he asked a corporal whom he sent to find it.

"An officer from the Twentieth has an observation post right here," said the corporal.

"Good. Golemi-Vrh is a beautiful mark for the artillery from the valley. I am going to order action immediately. Spale, your platoon there. Trailo, behind those stones. Cheda, try to catch the connection with the Twentieth. Is the ammunition coming?" cried this wonderful man, running to all sides.

I arranged two platoons in a battle line, sent patrols, and went toward Golemi-Vrh. I halted my soldiers at a stony hillside, which was an excellent position, for in front of it there was a little precipice, at three hundred metres in front of the Bulgarians. We chose the best stones. And exactly in the same moment when I opened fire, those at the pass opened also. It was near noon.

A dreadful storm began. In recalling this gigantic battle I feel that all words are weak and ineffective to describe it. It was a battle

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of life and death, the battle of fanatical wild men, intoxicated by the glory of victory, who were running, ragingly, to seize Basarski-Kamen, to throw themselves between Pasjacha and Malich Mountains, to take Nish and surround three hundred thousand Serbian soldiers; the battle of desperate defenders of their fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters, dying willingly, bathing themselves in their own blood, performing wonders; they were accomplishing this holy task. Life became a price with which was bought a new moment of liberty.

When I opened fire, the Bulgarians (a company of two hundred and seventy men) in front of my soldiers stopped, astonished. Certainly they did not expect us. In a second they dropped behind the stones and poured out their fire. God, were ever there such moments! Shooting on a stony place is a hundred times more terrible than on a common field, for the stones, smashed by bullets, fly into faces, cutting and stabbing them, wounding hands, digging out eyes.

Five minutes later our artillery in the val-

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ley began to act. We did not hear the booming or whistling, but suddenly the shells were exploding among the Bulgarians, making havoc. After a few moments the Bulgarians went ahead. New masses were rolling down from Golemi-Vrh. A question was in the air. A question of the selfish destiny which hovered between those two lines. I grasped it. It was the question of speed. Our artillery must shoot quickly so as to smash the masses of the enemy before they gained ground, or the Bulgarians would, with their quick forward movements, avoid this catastrophe, reach my position, annihilate my soldiers, and take the pass. I trembled in my whole body. I looked around me . . . for a moment I lost my presence of mind. Instantly after I called my orderly: —

“Run to the captain and say to him that the Bulgarians are advancing, and that the only help is the artillery, which must wipe out from my position to the top of Golemi-Vrh. Run!”

The soldier ran away.

Everywhere around was boiling, shaking,

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destruction. The horrible booming became the only sound, the heavy, gloomy sound which struck upon our heads. The men were falling. How they screamed . . . and above, the laughter of death. I felt that something gigantic was developing around me: something which will enter into history.

In front of my position were smoke, white dust, and blood; suddenly another sound broke this heavy, gloomy one, much more horrible and unsupportable. It was a human howl. The black masses had lifted themselves from behind the rocks and were running toward my side. The Bulgarians had gone ahead to solve the question. I straightened myself. An imperative power made me straighten. Heads and breasts appeared amidst the white dust and smoke. My soldiers had also raised themselves. Those are giants, ready for everything. Do you seek men, animals? Here they are. My soldiers fired with indescribable speed, imaginable only in a dream. Men were falling, making a dreadful curve as they fell. That which remained was only an ugly red mass of heads

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on the stones. The Bulgarians were coming closer. We felt their breath, and the filthy and pestilent sound splashed in our faces. To die! rang through my head, and I felt a powerful delight. Those moments are inexplicable. They are here . . .

Just a moment! Suddenly, in the midst of this booming, of these howls and shrieks, this ferocious readiness to fight and tear our flesh, to die, we heard a quick pattering. With the utmost rapidity, seeing my evident destruction, the captain had sent my two machine guns. Help! Rescue! From where? From here, behind those stones, from these valleys, from these forests and mountains, from this breast, from this land, from my country. Here, my brothers are fighting and dying; they help each other and die again . . . the spirit of poetry, the spirit of Serbia, has become a reality, which accomplishes wonders.

When the machine guns began to fire, my soldiers jumped, and straightened themselves completely, magnificent as the giants in the old songs of ours.

“You are sentenced to death, gentlemen

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Bulgarians!" I exclaimed, as if intoxicated. Our artillery, knowing now exactly the positions, worked with the speed and force of an ocean storm. The howling black mass is falling now . . . God, I never saw so much torn flesh! Pressed, crushed, divided into small parts, these three hundred men became insane beasts which bit their own flesh. A glance upon my soldiers: proud, erect, splendid, bareheaded, giving their breasts, were the fighters for liberty. And suddenly, as one man, powerful and thunderous, echoed, piercing the boiling air: —

Aoy, Kayka, what a load I carry!

Your mother's sorrow, now how can you marry?

Ee, yoo, yoo, brides are few,

Ee, yoo, yoo, brides are few,

They keep the ones they'd promised you.

Soldiers, mother, see the guns they carry!

They'll save us and come back and I shall marry!

Ee, yoo, yoo, brides are few,

Ee, yoo, yoo, brides are few,

They keep the ones they'd promised you.

I thought my heart would break with emotion and pride, true happiness, with love for

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these men, for these Serbian peasants, who do not know what the word "democracy" means, but who create it and write it with their own blood.

This black mass tried to gather itself for the last time, but stricken with a deadly horror, it became insane, and disheartened, turned its back.

"Powerful Tsar's armies are flying!" I was laughing. "But a painful road is that of safety, over stones, over sharp rocks and corpses, over the tainted foolish heads, which are buried in the depths of precipices."

Our artillery had covered every foot, shattered every stone, and smashed every single being. The devil himself could not live there!

A thunderous "Oorah!" vibrated and sounded everywhere, mingling with the song of my soldiers. I looked into the valley and at Batooshin. In the valley the men were fighting, hand to hand, over the white stones, killing pitilessly. And there, far over the tip of the tongue, four long lines were advancing, and before them, the Bulgarians were rolling, fighting, fleeing like hounds. Black spots upon

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the gray rocks remained deathly still behind those four lines, eight hundred and sixty in number. Those in the valley had lifted their hands into the air.

Victory! Victory! rang in my heart. Again a few moments of liberty were bought for this nation. At four o'clock all of Batooshin was retaken. The Twentieth Regiment went back to its old positions.

I remained at my place as "dead sentinel" before Golemi-Vrh, which no longer belonged to Bulgaria or to Serbia, but to death. During the night the Twentieth conquered the proprietor. When darkness began to fall, a frightened and embarrassed soldier came to me and said:—

"Lieutenant, the captain has ordered that Cheda remain with the soldiers and you are to come to him instantly." His voice was sad, low, and uncertain, and his lips quivered.

"Why?" I asked him, astonished.

"I don't know . . . I beg you, don't ask me," gasped the unhappy man.

A premonition of something terrible passed over me. What! After this victory, after this

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excitement, after this joy, unhappiness to come immediately!

“Speak, speak!” I exclaimed, grasping the soldier’s hand.

He looked at me, and his eyes filled with tears and his breast heaved. He wanted to speak to me, but could only swallow something in his throat which suffocated him. He tore his hand from my clasp and ran away. Why tears? I questioned. Whom does this unhappy soul grieve for? Why now? Suddenly I screamed, staggered, lost my sight, kneeled, and grew weak.

Spale, Spale! flashed through my head, and a power lifted me and gave me new strength. I ran over the stones. That which I never, never dared even to think had come true — he whom my heart so loved!

“Spale, Spale!” I cried, as if insane. I ran over the sharp rocks falling, bleeding.

I stopped. On an overcoat Spale was lying. My Spale! O God, why *this* stroke? A large white bandage was bound over his stomach. His clothes, torn, ragged, and bloody, had been cut from his body, and were scattered

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around. His breast was rising and falling . . . so slowly.

“Alive!” screamed something within me.

His eyes were closed . . . the face yellow and green, mouth wide open. The captain was kneeling beside him, looking fixedly at a spot, all his body convulsed by a terrible cough.

I felt as if I swayed, as if I could not stand any longer. I felt my consciousness going.

“Where is he wounded?” I asked with my last strength.

The captain raised his head slowly. His face was black, his eyes sunken . . . and said, with a killing pain: —

“In the spine. The legs are already dead.”

“In the spine,” I screamed, and fell beside him.

* * *

Lightning after lightning, thunder after thunder, a deluge of rain, the like of which I never saw in my life; wind, storm, tempest, a night of Stygian darkness; the fury and cruelty of raging nature which was at the height of its

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wildness and power. Such was the night when my company, the last one, left the town of Pirot.

The order for general retreat had come three days after the battle and victory at Batooshin and Odorovski Pass. We had to retreat even though the Bulgarians had not taken a single foot of this whole sector of Pirot, even though they, before the Second Army, which was at this position, had lost more than twenty thousand men. Yet by the game of destiny and the rule of ten to one, we were compelled to retreat. The Germans had taken Uzice, Jagodina, Parachin, Svilajnac, half of Serbia, and were advancing toward Krushevatz and Kralevo. The Bulgarians at the north had taken Aleksinatz and Derven, at the south, Vranje, Veles, Skople (Uskub), cutting the main railroad line, dividing the whole country into two parts. It was the whole meaning of Serbian misery. Now came the danger of our being cut off, and so we had to retreat. Literally this country was surrounded, pressed by fire, steel, wildness, and hatred. Yet the Serbian people still fought, with indescrib-

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able courage, coolness, and pride, on the bloody barricade of their liberty.

At eight o'clock we left our last positions and passed through Pirot. The town had died; no lights, not a single soul; a town of horror-land, or of the dead. Only the wind and storm shrieked between the silent little houses. When the lightning flashed, with its tremendous reddish-green light, we saw, for an instant, how the flood of icy water splashed the white walls. This ice-cold water dashed through our clothes and ran toward our hearts.

We met the Fourth Battery, the cannon which were always with my battalion, outside of the town. Those four cannon, our inseparable friends, our lovers, who had saved our lives already a hundred times, now went with my whole battalion, two companies ahead and two at the rear, for the Bulgarians might attack us at any moment in the darkness and storm. If that happened, we had to die with those friends.

The storm reached its height of violence. The lightnings crossed each other upon the

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black and heavy clouds and fell and mingled with the drenched earth. We were almost entirely blinded by these flashes; we lost every feeling, every trace even of a sense, whose name is sight. We went ahead by instinct, and, perhaps, by habit. The terrible menacing roll of the thunder ran through the black atmosphere. The rain fell as if poured from the clouds. Really, it seemed as if the whole heavy air was filled with icy water which moved and ran, before the foolish will of the raging wind. We were wet through and through. The freezing water poured into our necks and ran down our backs like the cold slime of a poison serpent. After a while we became stiffened and the swollen skin, from which the dirt peeled off, grew more and more insensible. We walked through something which was soft and deep, and which was icy cold and moved beneath our feet.

I went with Bata, as the whole battalion was together. Once in a while we would touch each other and grasp hold so as not to lose each other, or we would hold each other when one of us staggered in the wind, or from sleep-

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iness or stumbling through water and mud. We were going silently. It was impossible to talk and equally impossible even to smoke. I knew that he, as myself, had but one thought — Spale. Oh, my God! No, no, I cannot, I *will* not, make peace with the thought that this man, this soul, this artist, this friend, is now dying. Since I knew myself I have loved this friend whom I called Spale, more than myself. His beautiful eyes had looked upon me with childlike, innocent, and happy smiles through the bright, hopeful glance of boyhood, and through the tears of a man who is suffering from the unhappiness created among our people. Friend! One who has been in the battles, who has felt the bony embrace of death, who has bled, who has hungered, who has suffered superhuman pain, knows what this word means, knows what an angelical being is described by it. In such a time a friend is everything, father, mother, and brother, and happy life. After the horrors the glances meet each other, the hands grasp each other, and one feels so, so good. Spale, beside his friendship, carried in his heart the

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divine art for which we both lived. And now all this is dying in Cele-Koola, one of the many hospitals in Nish.

“He must die” was ringing in my whole being endlessly, causing such bitter pain that it would be folly trying to describe it. But one thing we knew very well, Bata and I, we must see him for the last time.

We went on and on for a long time, bent forward, fighting with the wind, and without rest. The horrors of the weather were not lessening. It began to be so dreadful, so terrible as to be insane. Our clothes became heavy as lead, clinging to, and chafing our skin. Although we could not feel, we knew that it was bitten and bleeding. The water flowed over the road. We stepped up to our knees at times in the water which ran so swiftly as to tax our strength. When the lightning flashed, we would stand aghast at seeing where we were.

Presently we began to meet strange beings. By the lightning we saw that many were in small groups, and that they were little, and that they staggered, and that they were

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falling. Then through the wind and rain we heard frightened exclamations, screams, and moans. Now they were everywhere among the soldiers. We felt that they were reaching out for us.

"Who are these?" I asked Bata loudly.

"Children," he replied.

"Children!" I exclaimed, frightened.

I came closer to one of the little creatures. When the lightning flashed, I saw that it was not a child, but an old man. A little *cheecha*, with a blanket thrown over his head and arms outstretched, trying to hold himself balanced.

"From where are those children?" I asked when the thunder ceased to roll.

"Don't ask," came to me an angry, painful voice and grew silent. But the *cheecha* staggered and clutched at me in order to keep from falling. I took him by his hand. Again the words began to fly: —

"Order . . . came that all children . . . from twelve to eighteen . . . fly . . . fly, boga me . . . know not . . . where . . ."

"The order came two weeks ago. Why are you so late?" I said.

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“Came . . . but you don’t know where Dojknica . . . is . . . In the mountains . . . far . . . desert, in sky. Then those children were ‘out’ . . . with sheep . . . far . . . we had to gather them . . . painfully. Then we had to kill . . . to butcher all the sheep . . . thousands . . . sorrows and pains for . . . they were all our fortune . . . mal . . . you know it yourself . . . to skin them . . . that the Bulgarians might not find the wool . . . we burned them . . . much work . . . unhappiness . . . we could not earlier . . .”

The words of this unhappy one came brokenly through the wind and rain. Suddenly I felt that he grasped my hand closely, that his face was near to mine, and he exclaimed in a heart-rending voice: —

“*Where* are we going?”

I did not reply to him. Only it came to me to embrace him and to weep.

After a time we saw lights through the night and rain. It was a large old *han*.¹ Red smoke poured out through the big broken windows, for many fires were burning inside,

¹ A very large, old, one-roomed inn by the highway.

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around which black shadows were crowding. Outside the han an immense throng of men, soldiers, women, children, horses, wagons, cannon, oxen, and sheep were moving and shifting in the darkness and rain. Screams, shouts, moans of children, and breathing of cattle came from it. When Bata and I finally got into the han, the acrid smoke bit our eyes. The han was jammed with soldiers, men, women, children, horses, and sheep. And many fires were burning on the ground. Around these were gathered pitiful crowds from which the water dripped and ran into the fires. The women were standing around them holding their screaming little ones. Children were lying near the walls in the water and mud quivering with pain and moaning piteously, trampled by the sheep. The soldiers, silent, dark, and stiff, were squatted beside the fires with hands outstretched, paying no attention to the hoofs of the horses which were at their backs. A woman stood beside me. Her wet hair clung against her dark and quivering face, and to her dress from which the water ran. She was holding a little

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child in her deathly tired arms, pressing it unconsciously to her wet and icy breast. The child, whose thin wet clothes clung to his little legs, was screaming with the last screams of exhaustion when there is no sound but a gasp of death. A convulsive shiver passed over him for the last time. He grasped with his last tiny strength his mother's ice-cold breast in his little hands.

"O God, what sin have I done?" whispered this mother, looking upon her child.

"Let us go from here," I said to Bata, and we went out into the darkness, cold, rain, and horror.

Thus Serbia had fled . . . The man who created *this* bears the name of Wilhelm II von Hohenzollern, and millions are exclaiming: "Hoch der Kaiser!"

After two days of retreat we stopped at the positions of Shpaya which were near the town of Bela-Palanka. These positions had defended the entrance of the cañon between the Pasjacha and Malich Mountains which comes out into the valley of Nish. Again the old game. Now, in order that the armies from

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the north, and especially the combined army which retreated from Aleksintz, should not be surrounded, in case the Bulgarians should pass earlier through this cañon, again we had to hold the positions. We were told that there was a need for twenty-four hours' delay. To secure this, twenty thousand men made an assault, driving the enemy for six miles. The battle was dreadful, persistent, wild, without any pity, without anything which could be prescribed to a man. There I saw how the black hands tore out throats, how the yellow teeth sank into flesh. There I saw how a Bulgarian struck the knife into the breast and jumped from one side to the other of his victim, holding firmly the handle in his fist, so that the knife would turn in the wound. There my captain reached the culmination of his unhappiness: he was only wounded; his left leg was crushed.

One night, after two days of this unparalleled butchery, we were near Nichka-Banya, a place two miles from the town of Nish. Two battalions of my regiment remained at Chegar and other positions as an advanced post, for

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defense. At three o'clock after midnight, two other battalions, mine and the second, were to retreat, and the other two in the morning. Those will be the last soldiers to pass through Nish.

* * *

After a long search and wandering through an immense building, full of screams, darkness, smell, and moaning, of dreadful shadows creeping near the walls of the corridors, Bata and I finally stood before a black door. On it was written with white chalk, "Moribundus," half rubbed out.

"Here it is," scarcely whispered Bata.

"Certainly he must die!" again struck my heart, for I knew from experience who came to the room with this inscription, and I felt as if something hot, ugly, and rough had clenched my throat.

Bata slowly opened the door . . .

Twilight, sweet, tender, rosy light; moaning, painful exclamations, smell of tobacco and flowers! We stopped before the door silent and aghast. Suddenly from a corner came a happy, exalted voice: —

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"Here, here, here I am!" We ran toward that voice.

Two outstretched, trembling arms, two beautiful, shining, but sunken, eyes, a happy smile upon the pale lips, were all that remained to a human being, with which to greet his friends. We grasped those two hands, the hands which had created divine works, we pressed them, and remained long silent and motionless.

"I knew you would come. How impatient I was waiting for you, but I knew you would come, my good, good ones! I was sure . . ." spoke Spale after a while, quickly, emotionally, drawing us convulsively toward him.

"Don't be scared. You will not hurt me," he continued, smiling when he saw that we were trying not to touch him.

"I do not feel . . . anything, at all! Except my arms, heart, and head, all, but you know a 'tout' qu'il faut souligner, — all is dead. They have given me a pleasure that I can be present at my own funeral! And so now I am holding endless eulogies to: Spale, the man who tried to be an artist, bohemian, painter,

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who began with 'The Fence' and finished with 'The Kiss'; then to Spale who is a son and whose mother does not know that he is now at his own funeral; then to the man who was a friend, which your presence proves; and finally, to Spale, soldier who died for his land without glory, without decoration . . . bad luck, boys!"

I straightened, and looked upon him, unable to believe this. I knew him as well as I knew myself. I thought I knew every single thought of his, and now I could not believe his words, this joke, this smile, this keen laughing, this contempt of death. He was lying in this bed from which he could never, never get up. And yet upon his face was a sincere, warm, happy smile, as if he was awakening in a beautiful spring morning with his window full of May roses. Under the cover his legs were outlined in an unnatural, stiffened position. His feet were crossed, the knees pressed together, and one could feel that something useless, dead, decaying, was there.

"Oh! I am just happy now!" he was exclaiming in the same happy voice. "You

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know, they told me that I have a wound large as a plate on my back. They also told me that its name is 'decubitus.' But I do not care a little bit about that knowledge. Think, what a pleasure! Somebody, making a good joke, said, he sees my bones, and I reply to him with that old philosophic 'One Semitic says all Semitics are lying.'"

"Mameene, mameene!" suddenly wailed a high, shrieking, dreadful voice. Frightened and amazed, we turned our heads. A big black arm waved in the air from a bed. In it a creature was shaking, writhing, twisting, moving the bed like a wild animal in a cage. We saw that he was bound, only the arm was free, big, bony, long, bitten, and bloody. And the voice, terrible to hear, the voice of an insane and dying man rang through the little room.

"That is the voice of something which has only enough life to seek its brain and love, the things which once made him *homo sapiens*," said Spale, seeing our astonishment. "His brain was carried away by a bullet, but there remained the strength with which he at-

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tacked us, seeking both. Don't be scared. He is harmless; he is bound. Yesterday, when the doctors and nurses and orderlies went away, they bound him, making safety for us by the windings of that cord. Poor man! Now he does not look any more for his brain, assured that that is a thing which remained on the pavement of Belgrade, but when he awakes (usually he sleeps very long) he still asks for his love — mother — who, poor one, is in a certain Polish village, for you must know he is a Pole. As you can see, one of a million of 'Bartek the Conqueror,'¹ ideal of German 'liberty' and perfection of 'right' given to the nations."

Quite in the same moment, when this unhappy one began to call for his mother, and while Spale spoke, we heard another sound. From the depths of a bed, quick, sharp, lamentable cries from under the cover reached toward us: *D-d-d-d-d ! . . . d-d-d-d-d !* A large, motionless mass was under the cover of the bed from which these sounds came.

"The same, only a little different," con-

¹ Tales by Henryk Sienkiewicz.

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tinued Spale, describing his dreadful neighborhood with wonderful quietness and sincerity. "From him everything was taken away, — force, brain, soul, — and only so much life remained with him as that he can, in this way, pronounce the fourth letter of the alphabet. Really a funny and wonderful thing! His name is Dooshan. And now, once in a while, he persistently pronounces this initial of his. Certainly he is introducing himself more than a hundred times to 'Madame Noire,' who, although much occupied these days in this land, yet finds time to come into this room. Since I have been here she has come eleven times. *Ma foi!* Lovely guest!"

I sat down beside Spale's bed and silently, sadly, looked around. Room! No, no, it cannot be called simply a room. This place where enters a human being, a God's creation, now a crushed and broken creature, at the border of life, but who, entering this place, still has a soul, soul of a martyr, fighter, and hero; still has a heart which throbs with goodness, ideals of a nation, song of a nation, liberty of a nation; still has the spirit, gigantic,

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unconquerable, the unbroken spirit, which eternally hovers over fifteen million people who bear the name of Serb! ¹ Such a one enters this place and several hours later is carried away, a cold, lifeless corpse; but soul, heart, and spirit fly outside through these windows and mingle with the universe, there, with power, eternity, sublimity, and holiness to create the future! And resurrect the nation! Yes, *this* is the place of holiness and glory. Glory; for instead of decorations on their breasts, those men are carrying wounds, received willingly while defending the liberty of this land. . . . Or this is the place of horrors in which death as a mediator is paying the debts for the native country in such a dreadful, indescribable way. Just because this unpayable debt is paid in such a way, it is impossible that it remains as a dead thing, for death buys new lives, and debts paid with blood give liberty. Then is this place the place of holiness, glory, and horrors!

There were seven beds under the softened

¹ The spirit of united "Yugoslav Nation" which must be realized.

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electric light which was covered with pink paper. Five were standing against the wall in front of us, and two against the opposite side; between these two was the stove. On one of the beds near the window was Spale. On the right side of his bed were two windows and on the left the door. In the middle of the room was a large table with a white cover. Four large plain bowls full of fresh flowers were on it. Chrysanthemums, chrysanthemums! How many there were, and how beautiful! And their sweet perfume! It seemed as if this perfume were struggling with the smell of wounds and odor of death which crept through the room like an ugly serpent. Evidently the sweet good chrysanthemums were the conquerors.

Five beds before my eyes! On the first, near the window, was the Pole, with his arm; next to him Dooshan, motionless. Then a giant, big and stout, was sitting in the bed with his black, hairy, disheveled head leaning against the wall. His right hand and breast were heavily bandaged in white cloth. His left hand, with amazing rapidity, was lifting

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and falling, from the edge of the bed to his mouth, holding the eternal cigarette. He would draw the smoke into his mouth, eagerly swallow it, hold his breath, and after a short while, puff it out with great force from his large breast, and watch the rings of smoke with his staring, wide-open black eyes. He was persistently silent, sunk in painful thoughts, paying no attention to anything. Only when his fingers were burned he would exclaim: "Sister, tobacco!"

"The scholars have invented a wonder which they named 'gas-flegmona,'" continued Spale in his introduction, with the same manner, "which has an ugly habit of killing a man, even a giant like that. His wound is small, but unhappily he has this big sickness. In order to destroy it there is immediate need to cut off the arm, but the Serbian doctors had to go away and the poor American doctors ¹ have only about one hun-

¹ The American Medical Mission was in Belgrade in the large pavilions of the "Vojna Bolnitsa" staying there, after Belgrade was attacked, to the last moment. Finally, when the hospital was set on fire, they retreated. Later, coming to Nish, the Serbian Government asked them to care for and surrender the Serbian wounded to the Bulgarians.

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dred and fifty cases like this, and one day has only twenty-four hours. Conclusion: he has to die!"

Next to this man a small, tender figure was in the bed. From time to time painfully weak moans came from the shaking little figure.

"You would never believe who is under this blanket," continued Spale. "A child. Fourteen years! Fleeing from Belgrade, he and many others, as maybe you know, had a race with a German 'taube.'¹ Certainly he lost the race or 'taube' would n't be 'taube'! And 'pigeon' — again a German irony — poured fire and death over the flying, unhappy ones. His father, mother, two sisters, and a hundred others were killed, and he, wounded, thrown into the mud. Our soldiers, retreating, found him and picked him up. But with him they also picked up the tetanus. Again a scholar's controversy in the time of peace; whether it be animal or fungus; it lives in darkness, mud, stables, and so much likes human blood that when it grasps

¹ One of the latest models of German aeroplanes.

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the red canals it soaks up the blood in a very short time. It is said that this is a most terrible death, for these animals — or mushrooms, if you wish — do not have the taste for such things as brain and soul, so a man is conscious to the very last moment — in this case a little child!”

My hair stood on end at these words. There were so many pains, bitternesses, astonishments that I was unable to comprehend, that I felt myself weakening as from an ugly, nauseating debility. Bata was stiff and pale as death, but on Spale’s face the same smile still. The smile of happiness!

Next to this child was a man crucified on his bed, dreadful as the dreams after a bloody battle. He was uncovered, both legs were sheathed in large, white metal cases. His body rested on his bent elbows which were pressed into the bed. His head hung backward, his long black hair fell back on the pillow. His mouth was wide open, but not a sound was to be heard.

“He is my Christ,” said Spale, although we did not ask him. “Looking upon him, I

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finally got the idea how much the Son of God must have suffered when he was nailed against the wood. And this unhappy one is nailed, too, crucified as nobody else of his time. His legs are nailed to the bed by wounds, for both are crushed, and his arms are nailed by his own will in order to protect his back on which are four wounds. . . . From a Bulgarian knife, gentlemen! When the Bulgarian bullet sped through his knees, half an hour later the Bulgarian knife fell upon his back, for, oh, daring! he still moved. I think he is equal to Christ, for he is silently suffering and dying. *He is a man.*"

Unwillingly our look went toward the corner where the last bed was separated from Spale by the stove.

"Not there!" exclaimed Spale. "As much as I have strengthened my æsthetic feelings looking upon these five beds, these five men, who are dying manfully, beautifully, magnificently, insomuch 'this' would destroy, not only æsthetic, but every single feeling. This is something which we are unable to grasp, but which kills."

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Just because of these words, we bent lower, by a foolish instinct of curiosity, to look into this corner. No, no, this is impossible! The words are not yet invented for this! Only, there in the corner, in the twilight, was something which still lived!

And between those beds, between that horror, this beautiful death, this wonder, this dream, these incredible things, these flowers, perfume, rosy light, moved a white shadow, tender, beautiful, gracious, pale, sad, suffering, bowing by the side of death. It was all in white, with rosy shadows in the folds, and with red crosses on breast and forehead. To this shadow the giant spoke: "Sister, tobacco!"

"Angel!" exclaimed Spale with emotion, noticing that we looked upon her. "Looking at this girl and feeling her goodness I realized how painter and poet came to create the idea of an angel." Then, following his thoughts and wishing to fill up his introduction, he continued: —

"Simple story, brothers! Simple and usual, for thousands like her are in this land. She was young, she was beautiful, she was inno-

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cent and happy. She lived and sang in the warm free little nest beside the good father and dear mother, awaiting the time when she would start, in her liberty, to create her own nest. Now the nest is destroyed, the father killed, the mother dead from typhus and sorrows, and she remains alone. From an innocent girl she became a woman . . . a woman who, in a dreadful moment, in a rough and cruel time, has decided her position, ruled by the instinct of her sex. And, guided by the advice of her heart and instinct, seeing that man, her defender, her connection, her half, her life, is dying, perishing, she became an angel! Before, her name was Beeserka (little pearl), now, simply Sister. And to-day she is doing wonders with her angelic heart and white hands. Never a man would do for his brother what she has done for a stranger! When yesterday the doctors called her to fly with them, she lighted the cigarette for the giant and said to him: 'Meeka, always when your cigarette is gone, you have only to say: "Sister, tobacco!"' The doctors were astonished when she said that, shrugged their

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shoulders and left; she remained. We all know we must die, but she makes death beautiful, easy, tender, as a dream in which we hear the songs of angels. Every morning she brings flowers. See! Many, many chrysanthemums! And when she is standing at the open door, in the morning sunlight, with her arms full of these beautiful flowers, when her white cheeks, beautiful dark eyes, and red cross appear amidst the little white and red blossoms, so full of life and morning freshness, I cry in greeting her: ‘Good-morning, little angel with chrysanthemums!’ She comes close to my bed, puts the sweet fresh chrysanthemums on my breast and around my head, and everywhere. Their perfume intoxicates me and puts me to dreaming, dreaming . . . Thus she makes us already feel paradise . . .”

She slowly came to Spale’s bed with a beautiful, hesitating smile, sat down beside him, and began tenderly to caress his forehead and hair. Then, looking at him with a sister’s eyes, full of tears, a perfumed sigh came from her angelic breast: —

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“My good Spale!”

Spale’s breast quickly rose and fell with emotion and happiness.

“This girl has conquered me!” exclaimed Spale, clasping her hand in both his own and carrying it to his lips. The tears were falling from his eyes.

It came to me to kneel before these two beings, these Serbians, and say prayers to God.

* * *

We sat for a long time, and Spale continued to speak.

We had already seen so many horrors that our hearts quickly got the habit, and we became used to this room, and to that unhappy Pole, and poor Dooshan, and the giant who every once in a while called for tobacco and at whose call the sister would jump from Spale’s bed and go to him, and to the quivering movement of the little child to whom the Sister would go, glancing upon his face with a heart-broken look. She would stand silently by him with a heavy heart, for she could do nothing for him. Only she would bow over

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him and kiss the pale white forehead. The child wanted to tell her something, but the dreadful disease had closed his jaws so powerfully that only anguished shrieks came from his breast. But eyes, little dark eyes full of tears, spoke in beautiful words: "Thank you, thank you" . . . And to everything else we became used in those few hours, for, my God! the human heart suffers, and throbs and lives in order to suffer still more.

On Spale's face still the same smile, the same flood of words. We listened to him sitting in a black-and-white half dream. Evidently Bata was suffering torture, for his face was deadly pale and his eyes closed. I was, while listening to Spale's words, flying to the past in my thoughts, to those beautiful days in which there was so much sun, happiness, and liberty. And through this chain of sweet memories flashed the fiery words: He has to die!

Presently Spale became serious. His eyes became still more shining. He pressed with his elbows against the bed and lifted his head, and in a sure and powerful voice he said: —

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“Why are you so pale? What are you regretting? Me? Foolishness! Do you not understand this time, this century? You see, the earth is boiling, millions are dying, something is being created! In my half-dead life, I come closer to the power which rules over creation. The power described in the ‘*Légendes des Siècles*.’ No, no, you can’t understand this, but believe in me. I have succeeded in explaining, in living through great mysterious things in this dream of death. I am happy, I still have enough life to awaken and tell this to you.

“Do you remember my ‘Fence’? The eternal, strong iron fence in this world which divides man from man. This is that which aches the most in the heart of man. Studying abroad, I felt this ache, this pain myself, and in my sincerity and my ideal youth I made the little picture which I called ‘The Fence.’ ‘Little, but the greatest truth,’ you said, Bata, when you saw it for the first time. Now the colors begin to speak. In front the road, dusty, rough, full of clods, endless, painful, the road of unhappiness over which rolls the

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life of common men, of millions of poor ones, of workers, of democrats, in heat, and in ice; behind it in a garden, full of green, and blossoms, flowers, and perfume, rosy rays, bright sunlight, life of happiness and abundance, was the place where lived the aristocracy. And between this road and that garden, the fence, strong iron and steel. The misery of the destiny of all human life through centuries did its most terrible injustice, when it was permitted that those on the unhappy road could look through, between the bars, into the garden.

“Centuries long has this life fled. Centuries long these people of the road have suffered, carrying the fruits of their pain to the gates of the fence, which only open to receive them and close immediately. But time is the teacher, and sufferings are not everlasting. The people begin to awake, to revolt, seeking rights and justice. And through centuries the suffering crowd of miserables attack the fences. Some of them were destroyed and equality and happiness were created; the others became stronger; still more iron was

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put upon them. Then among the people the spirit arose, and, in individuals, right, which gave them the power called 'democracy.' The power of the people was growing even amidst their sufferings and pains, and the spirit and the right were becoming stronger and stronger. In their abundance and happiness, in their fear, terror, astonishment, with their old despotic spirit, those in the garden made their fences still stronger and stronger. You see, there was a storm in the atmosphere . . . you see, the time had to come when the destiny of man had to be solved. This is the meaning of this war. Man is fighting for his life, for equality. Yes, man is destroying the fences. This is unyielding justice.

"This fight is now on. Do you see, do you feel, that the earth is now shaking? The cities are destroyed, the churches are gone, the mountains are leveled, all traces of the forests are lost, millions are dying. For this is the fight of the people for democracy. For this is the only way of the future, for this is the only road to the final happiness of humanity. The Spirit of this century is fight-

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ing now with the whole of History from its creation. Now this earth is in the *status-nascenti*, in the moment of creation, in which, by natural laws, when two opposite elements meet, an explosion has to come — the explosion is this world war, the explosion which will crush out twenty million lives, but will destroy the fences. You hear me — destroy the fences, for the flood of the blood of twenty millions has no hindrances. And just as in the last century Waterloo was not gained by Wellington and Blücher, but by God and the Spirit of that time when the people tried to destroy the fences, so it is to-day, now, the Kaiser has to perish, for against him are not armies, but God, Democracy, and the Spirit of the twentieth century. You see this Spirit . . .”

Suddenly, oh, is it a dream? An indescribable red light glared, and the windows, with a terrible crash, flew into the room, scattering glass upon the beds and floor. A raging pressure tore into the room and threw everything down. Then came an explosion which waved out into the infinite. Its gigantic rings on

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their flashing road shook this immense building. Immediately after, darkness and silence. The electric light was gone.

"God, what is it?" exclaimed the Sister.

"They are setting the powder magazines on fire, they are destroying the bridges and everything," I said, shivering.

Then again, another explosion, a third, a fourth. In this building of misery all were awake and moving. We heard noise, exclamations, moans, screaming, terrible screams. Doors were opening. Then steps, running, falling. A dull, distant noise came from the town — the tumult of frightened people. But in this room, far from everything which has to do with life, in the darkness, in this icy horror and agony, was silence, and only the light of the cigarette of the giant quickly appearing and disappearing. The Pole and Doo-shan were motionless, knowing nothing about this. The weak moaning of the child broke the heavy silence of the room.

"Now they are destroying a hundred years of life and liberty!" Spale's voice quivered in the darkness. "Yes, everything which we

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created in a hundred years, is destroyed in a few weeks. Poor Serbia! The explosion of this century has crushed out not only lives, but the whole country. This is the destiny. Yet, yet, understand me, Liberty creates the Nation; the Nation, Liberty and Democracy, both. It creates the future."

Fires arose soon after these explosions. There, far through the shattered windows, over the Nishava, in the "Old Fortress," an immense tongue of flame licked the black sky.

A thick smoke, full of awful smells, enveloped the whole town. It entered this room and poisoned the breath and blinded the eyes of these poor creatures. It was more than terrible! Ruin and death ruled!

"They have set on fire all magazines, factories, barracks, stables, hospitals, houses," said Bata.

The dull, frightening noise still came from the town. The faint red light of distant conflagrations danced upon the white walls, painting the shadows of hell. In the building still sounded exclamations, moans, steps, and

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running. Yes, the Bulgarians are coming, they are close.

"I am going," suddenly exclaimed the giant in a dreadful, resolute voice, and lifted himself from the bed. He looked tremendously tall and large, in this darkness, smoke, and red light. We jumped. The Sister screamed and ran toward him.

"Where in the name of God are you going?" the poor Sister screamed, grasping him by the hand and pulling him toward the bed. He tore his hand from her grasp and straightened himself. The bandage around his arm and breast seemed to me unnaturally large.

"I will *not* be a slave while I am alive," he said with the same sharp, resolute voice.

"But you will die on the road," wept the poor Sister.

"Yes, but *free*," interrupted the giant in the same manner.

"This is impossible, you *must* remain . . . you hear me, you *must* remain! The American doctors are here and they will defend you," desperately exclaimed the poor girl.

We were standing, petrified, astonished.

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Only I felt a powerful, unconquerable, strong yet bitter pride.

“Poor American doctors, they do not know the Bulgarians,” continued the giant, “but *I* know them. I still have the strength. I can still carry myself. I want to die free, — hear, Sister, *free* ! I beg of you, for the last time, do me a favor. Throw my overcoat over my shoulders and put on my shoes.”

“Go, go, Meeka, go while you can,” spoke for the first time the man who was crucified on the bed. This voice I will *never, never* forget.

And the Sister bowed . . . oh, good soul, holy became the memories of you to me! When she had put on his shoes and placed the overcoat upon him, the giant started. Suddenly he stopped, turned, and the big figure quivered for a moment. Then he slowly came to the white girl, who stood like a stone, bowed over her, and kissed the red cross on her forehead. Then he quickly straightened himself and pulled wide open the door. On the threshold he turned for the last time and exclaimed in an unforgettable voice, “A Serbian while he

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is living will *never* be a slave," and closed the door.

I pressed both hands over my face and mouth, in order to stifle something which wanted to fly from my breast. It was that which kills. Slave! What! My Spale to be a slave? This man, this Serbian? This artist who for love of his Serbia had created "A Kiss"? The kiss with which Veela, the maiden, our symbol of beauty, Serbia in her happiness, kisses the sweet sigh of liberty, which wafts over the blue and charming land of Serbian poetry? And *he* to be a slave? There is no greater cruelty than this! God left him only so much life that he could see to-morrow how the Bulgarian boot will enter this sacred room, how the most brutal of voices will exclaim: "In the name of the law and Tsar Ferdinand."

Deep silence was in the room. In the distance the fires flamed higher and higher, spreading out, gaining power. The red smoke rolled under the black sky. The tumult from the town became more distinct, the panic of unhappy women and children which wiped

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out their lives. A terrible noise was in this building. Men were going out. Wagons thundered endlessly on the road. Now and then explosions shook the earth.

The Serbian heart, old, gray, good Nish is dying.

* * *

The dawn came. Spale was silent. His eyes were closed. The Sister's hand was on his forehead — a white, beautiful, tired butterfly upon a torn flower.

The explosions had stopped. The flames could no longer be seen. The sun, which was burning, had conquered them. Only the smoke — black, thick, poisonous — hung under the blue sky.

It seemed to me that the room was terribly cold. The overthrown chrysanthemums were scattered on the table. The water from the bowls was splashed over the floor. Piles of broken glass glittered in the room. The giant's empty bed in the middle looked icy cold. The Pole's arm had finally fallen; he was motionless and for a long time silent. Was he dead?

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From Dooshan's bed still came something weak, painful, something which was vanishing. The child's thin figure was still shaking. The crucified man was dreadfully silent. That dark corner, behind the stove, seemed like a source of death, from which ice and horrors poured out.

Finally the sun appeared. The fresh rosy-red rays entered through the broken windows and stopped at Spale's pillow. They were playing there. They were beautiful. There was bitter irony and strange happiness in this moment.

"The sun!" sighed Bata, as if he had awakened from a deep and heavy dream.

"Sun," whispered Spale, and opened his eyes.

Upon his face again the old smile was shining. Around his head, all over the white pillow, in his beautiful hair, the joyful rays were smiling. His eyes gleamed wonderfully, and his hands were shaking.

"I feel its warmth. Good sun, sweet rays," he spoke as one in a dream. Suddenly he grasped the Sister's hand: —

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“I beg you, Sister, turn me around, I want to kiss them for the last time.”

The Sister trembled, and for a moment seemed like one fainting. On Spale's face was a smile, still more beautiful, still more charming, and with a tender glance he caressed the white figure. The Sister slowly, painfully got up. She looked unwinkingly in his face for some time, then she gently took his head and shoulder and turned him toward the pillow. The dead leg fell over the other. Spale looked for a moment at the rosy rays, then quickly bowed his head, and buried his lips in the sunny pillow.

“Farewell, farewell, my good ones,” he exclaimed several times.

Farewell! I straightened myself. Bata staggered. God! what does this mean? What will happen now?

When the Sister again put him down in the old position, the tears of an unspeakable happiness were in his eyes. He looked upon us some time as in an ecstasy. Then, understanding our deadly fear, he said in the gentlest voice: —

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“Why are you so frightened? Why are you again so pale? You know that I hate that yellow color . . . and this is so natural. At least, you have to understand me. They said I could live a whole month, perhaps longer if I had good care. Thanks . . . whole month, What! A Bulgarian to take care of me? What! To live? To see how the Bulgarian animals enter this room, committing sacrilege against all its holiness, throwing the flowers of this angel under their feet? Oh, my good friends, can you not see what a great impossibility? This girl understands me. When God did not kill me to keep me from seeing this last horror, His angel will . . . Why are you shaking, Sister? Your promise, your promise! You are doing your best work when you inject scopolamin into my dead body. And the spirit! The spirit will fly into the air where there is endless liberty, and remain in your hearts, living eternally. This is paradise! Think! To die in a sweet dream, knowing that I press the hands of my friends, knowing that I look on my brothers, these heroes dying, but still in the arms of liberty, knowing that

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I am beside an angel, thinking constantly of my poor mother. Yes, my good mother . . . and knowing that I died for my country, knowing that I am still *free*."

He fixed his beautiful look upon the white figure of marble, the look which said: "I am ready."

And the woman with her last power, forgetting everything, the instinct of her sex, the loss of her half, her connection, her future, the imperative desire of her life, from doll to motherhood, hearing only the tragedy of her Serbian heart, her angelic look replied: "And I, also, am ready!"

* * *

We stopped at the big door of the hospital. I was so weak that I thought I could move no more. Bata was still deadly pale, an ugly yellow color had flooded his face. I was leaning against the door. Through the wide-open gate we saw the soldiers passing along the road. The last Serbian soldiers are marching through Nish. Black, ragged, muddy up to the neck, bent forward, these heroes were go-

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ing. Do not ask for their feelings. They are silent. They are silent. They suffer and die, and again suffer and die, and they are again silent; as if they knew that the most suitable language for a tragedy is silence.

The wind now carried the heavy smoke toward the Bulgarians. The gigantic and terrible flames waved over the "Old Fortress." The little white silent houses were bathed in the ocean of morning sunlight. And the sun is shining . . . God! is that an irony? Or something which we do not understand?

Finally we started. For the last time I turned toward the building with large black holes. "Farewell, my little one," I whispered within myself. The tremendous sorrow, raging unhappiness, dreadful strokes, became a heavy eternal bitterness of tragedy.

The streets were empty and dead. Everything was closed. The soldiers went in one direction. Sometimes the cannon thundered over the pavement, sometimes cavalry. A silent, dark, dreadful shadow crept near the walls, the wounded, fearful, half dead, with crutches, slowly, painfully, with their last

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strength were trying to buy their liberty. Some of them had already succeeded.

At the market before the Hotel Orient was a group of men, a few old men, two ministers and an old woman. Were they alive? They were motionless with their looks fixed upon the ground. They were gathered to go before the Bulgarians and to beg of them (oh, my God!) to spare the women and children. Poor men! Only a few days after you were the first ones to be hanged.

The big steel bridge over the Nishava, completely wrecked, hung from its two ends in the muddy river, whose turbulent waters streamed over it. Farther below, the large wooden bridge was still burning.

Around the white cathedral we met old women, who, disregarding fear and their old age, went into the church, with a candle in their shaking and bony hands, to say prayers to God, kneeling before the holy ikonas. For what? Old unhappy heart of the mother knows, and it believes. Some of them were screaming loudly while going.

A woman gave wine from a window. The

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soldiers drank it without a word. In the *charsheea* where the shops were, the pavement was covered with merchandise which had been thrown out of the shops, so that the soldiers might carry it away. A few of them bent and gathered up some, others shrugged their shoulders and jumped over the piles, for the time had passed many centuries ago for *omnia meum mecum porto*.

At the railroad station, horrors: iron and steel in monstrous piles all twisted, melted, and broken; the locomotives with their noses in the middle of these piles; rails and switches like serpents over the earth. Many buildings were destroyed to their foundations, whose remnants covered these piles of iron and steel.

In front of the railroad station was an immense building, perhaps one of the largest buildings in Serbia. Before, it was a military school; now, it was a hospital. Dreadful, indescribable shadows were standing at uncountable black holes looking down upon the soldiers who were passing. These were the wounded. Fifteen hundred remained in this building. Like a vision of something unimag-

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inable these creatures were standing in the windows. There are moments when a stone may weep; now, this building was crying. Destiny had left so much life to these unhappy ones that they could become slaves. Some hands wrapped in white waved to us from these black holes. It seemed as if they were saying: "Good-bye, most happy among living ones!" This, too, was irony.

When we came out from the town we found our battalion. We stopped on a hill. The town was lying at our feet — the town of flame, of smoke, of horrors, of unhappiness, the town of slavery, the stage for Bulgarian wildness, cruelty, and fiendishness; and yet the town of Serbian history and of the past, the town of our beauty and honesty, the holiness of this land, old martyr who suffered through the centuries, and our good, gray old one who was so happy in its days of Serbian liberty. It was Nish . . .

Some time before noon of this sunny day of God, the Bulgarian cavalry entered into it. The hoof of Gessler's horse was stamping in the middle of our heart. And the next day the

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Bulgarians were raging in their victory, committing every sacrilege in the midst of our gray Nish.

Thus Nish fell.

With piteous cruelty was the heart of Serbia torn out, this beautiful, honest, red Serbian heart which lived and throbbed only for Liberty and Democracy.

The man who did this bears the name of Wilhelm II von Hohenzollern, and millions are still crying: "Hoch der Kaiser!"

II

THE GRAVEYARD BY THE MORAVA

AFTER the fall of Nish my division had retreated on the right bank of the Morava River; its task was to prevent the Bulgarians from crossing, and to keep open for traffic the high road toward the south on the left bank. The Combined Army of fifty thousand men had to pass along this road.

South of Nish, on the left bank of the river, stretched the valley of the Morava for twenty miles; in front of Leskovatz this valley became undulating and ascending. Around the town the mountains rose like a gigantic amphitheater. In order to enter the town one must pass through a wide, natural gateway between two beautiful romantic hills which ended the amphitheater. This pass faced the river, beyond which was the mountain-side on which my division was intrenched. The highway from Nish and Krushevatz went through the central part of the valley and

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turned to the left near Leskovatz, leading on through the pass and the town into the mountain fastnesses. If the whole Combined Army could get through this pass it would be secure; then my division could take positions around the town in natural fortresses, where they could easily defend the place and hold the enemy back until the Combined Army had time to escape beyond the mountains. But could this be done?

The Bulgarian army had not attacked us for some time with infantry, but had discharged their wicked shells, which exploded high above us, staining the pure blue of the skies with smoke. I took advantage of this respite to look through my field-glasses at the valley below me. Thousands and thousands of human beings were creeping along the valley! Here and there one could see masses moving very slowly. These masses were composed of men, women, and children, oxen, cows, sheep, goats, dogs — all jammed together, painfully pushing forward. I could see that they tried to hurry their slow march, but it seemed as if they stumbled at each step

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over invisible obstacles, and it seemed too as if some great force — the spirit of their native land, perhaps — held them and did not permit them to go forward.

The homes of these people had been burned and destroyed without pity. The fields had been trampled and their fruits ruthlessly crushed into the earth. The rivers were flowing turbid with blood. The songs of the brooks had been drowned by the scream and crash of shot and shell. The forests had been uprooted, broken, ruined, enveloped in smoke and stench. The cemeteries were demolished and desecrated, and the flowers on the tombs were trampled by the hoofs of horses. The bells would never ring again from the white towers of the churches. The grandfathers and grandmothers had been killed amid the ashes of their homes. Song and happiness were replaced by weeping and wailing, the crash of artillery, unspeakable ferocity and cruelty. It was now a land of horror from which they fled — this country which they thought would always be a land of happiness and love, a flowery corner where one could live as in

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paradise. Always to be the good mother — their dear native land! And now? Human imagination could not picture a worse hell.

Fright had stiffened their limbs and horror had palsied their minds. My glasses showed me dreadful pictures. A mother carried her infant bound on her back. She clasped the next younger one to her breast, and the older ones, holding to her skirt, ran after her, barefooted, half-clothed, weeping and crying from fear, cold, and hunger. When one of these little ones grew so weak; when his little heart began to beat so slowly; when his little feet, wounded, cut, bloody, and exhausted, could no longer carry his tired body, and his tiny hand, which had held fast to his mother's skirt, was no longer able to hold on, then he let go of the skirt, which was his only shelter; his mother was lost to him and he stood alone. The poor woman could not hear his appealing cry; there were five others around her who were weeping. Suddenly a flock of frightened sheep rushed by, and the child was thrown down into the mud; then came oxen and cows and wagons. Some one among the refugees,

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who had not yet lost his heart amid this horror, picked up the little body and threw it into a ditch near the road that it might not be crushed any more. In such times, unhappy is every woman who bears the name of mother!

I saw young girls carrying white bundles in which were all the wedding garments which they had spun and woven in happiness of heart, always with songs on their beautiful lips. Shame, fear, and horror were marked upon their young faces, for the victors had no pity.

I saw men and old woman loaded with things saved from the fire, or wrested from the bloody hands of the enemy. Oh, how they staggered, those old people, under the weight of these precious burdens, all that remained of their former riches, and the remnant of life's labor! Before them were driven the weary and starving cattle. They begged these poor creatures to "go on, go on, my dears, only a little farther." No one knows the number who died in that grim valley, or the heart-rending scenes there. When an only child

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fell, its mother would lie beside it and with her last strength gather the child to her breast and wait for their black fate.

I saw also the long, dark lines of infantry. How they staggered, wavered and broke, but quickly gathered themselves in order and marched on! Blackened, ragged, bloody, bearing many wounds, yet, with resolute looks and clenched teeth, carrying in their hearts faith in strength and justice, marched these men, stronger than death — the last defenders of their native land.

Everywhere along this valley one could see hundreds and hundreds of wagons. Some turned aside from the thronged roads into the fields, where they tried to go on; but the horses were worn out, the wagons overloaded, the men had made their last efforts. They could go no farther; they remained there, sunk in the deep mud.

An appalling sound rose from the valley, the mingled weeping, screaming, and crying of children, the groans of men, and the lowing and bellowing of the animals.

I leaned my head against the cold stone to

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shut out this horrible scene, and held both hands over my breast that my heart should not break.

* * *

At two o'clock in the afternoon the colonel called all the officers of my regiment. As my captain had been wounded ten days before, I, being the next oldest officer, had replaced him and gone to the colonel to take his orders. In a small narrow cup of the hills, shut in by gray rocks, I found him with the other officers around him. I was frightened by the looks of these men. They were pale, dirty, blood-stained, ragged, exhausted, and unshaven. Some of them had bandaged hands, others had bandaged heads. Most of them had no caps; some were shivering with fever; others could hardly stand because of intolerable pain. God! did *I* look the same? Could these be the healthy, handsome young men who went into the struggle two months ago?

As the youngest I took the last place. We were all standing motionless, waiting for orders from the colonel, who stood before us.

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He looked tenderly upon us; his eyes dimmed, and a shadow seemed to pass over his face. His glance fell; he sighed deeply. Suddenly he straightened himself and threw out his chest; and, looking upon us again with a firm resolute gaze, thus spoke the "Old Lion": —

"Gentlemen, I could have sent a written order to you, but I summoned you to say that our efforts have been rewarded. We have saved the Combined Army. Also I wish to say that the Vojvoda sends congratulations to you. And I, I admire you, gentlemen! This is not flattery. You know that I cannot flatter, nor do I wish to, for it would be an insult to your efforts and your bravery. Gentlemen, I simply admire you with all my heart. I see what you have done and I know what you must do. Officers, it is demanded of us to defend Lescovatz; Serbia demands that you die in order to save her other children!"

The colonel was silent for a moment. A deathly hush fell upon us. I looked upon the men around me. A young lieutenant beside me grasped convulsively at my hand to keep from falling. His head was bandaged around

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the cheek and chin with a dirty cloth through which the blood-drops crept, gathering on his chin and falling on his breast. A captain beside him had a wounded arm which was slung from his neck in a colored shawl, beneath which could be seen the hand, red and swollen; slowly he drew up his other hand and placed it over the wounded one, that the others might not look upon it. Another, a captain, clenched his teeth to prevent their chattering from the racking fever which shook him. But his clothing shivered as in the wind. Farther on stood a young major who was without a cap: his face was red, his hair wet, and from his forehead great drops of sweat ran down. One could see that he was consumed by raging fever. But in spite of all this, when the colonel spoke his last words, every man straightened up. Their looks showed that they had understood the colonel and were ready to make this last sacrifice.

The colonel continued: "I have received orders from headquarters. During this day and the coming night, the Combined Army will pass through the pass of Lescovatz. You

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know that the main attack of the Bulgarians was against this army. It has fought for a month and withstood all these attacks, surviving superhuman efforts, and, at last, has marched day and night without rest. The men are exhausted. Beyond Lescovatz are the mountains, through which the advance is very difficult, and for these worn men it will be still more trying. This means that they must have time to reach safety. Our division must procure this for them by defending Lescovatz. Here is the plan. The Twentieth, Eighteenth, and our regiment will cross the Morava at once, and take the positions around the town. The Fourteenth Regiment will remain here with a detachment of mountain artillery and check the enemy during the day and following night until three o'clock in the morning, when they will cross the river, blowing up the bridge behind them. Meanwhile we must make all possible preparations for the fight of the next day. My regiment will defend the position at the right of the town. To every company I give its section."

Then the colonel told the commanders

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their sections, and gave the precise information. Presently he came to me: —

“Second company of the fourth battalion?” he asked me.

“Yes, sir.”

“How many soldiers have you in your company?”

“About one hundred and fifty, sir.”

“That means that you have lost more than a hundred. Take better care of your children, my boy!” he added jokingly.

I smiled bitterly.

“One hundred and fifty!” continued the colonel. “That is a fine number. Others do not have half as many. Because of this I have decided to give you a very important position. You will occupy the position at Mirno Brdo [Peaceful Hill], which is at the right side of the pass. You will dig trenches toward the pass and the valley. I will give you two field-cannon and three machine-guns. Do you see how *I* take care of my children? Remember — dig the trenches as deep as possible and as soon as you can. *Do you understand?*”

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“Yes, sir.”

I was the last one to receive orders. Meanwhile the other commanders went to places where they could examine the valley and the position of Lescovatz. Some used field-glasses and all had maps. I took my map to locate my “Peaceful Hill,” and quickly found it.

I felt as if I had been struck: I saw the mark of a cemetery on my position. Unable to believe this, I took my field-glasses to make sure that I was right. It was true; I distinctly saw the crosses, the graves, and the white monuments.

A cemetery! I did not know what to think. The colonel was moving away. I ran over to him.

“There is a cemetery, sir, over the whole of my position!”

The colonel looked at me with surprise and smiled bitterly.

“I know. Well?”

“The firing line goes along the crest of the hill and I shall have to dig my trenches through the middle of the cemetery among the graves —”

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"I know! Well?"

"How can I dig up the graves?"

"How? With pick — with pick and shovel, my boy! Listen! I do not defend the dead, but the *living*. I do not defend cemeteries, but our native land. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," I whispered.

"How right he is!" I thought to myself; and went quickly to my company.

My company still had four platoons. The sergeants of these were good men and very brave. Two of them I was especially fond of, Bora and Cheda. Bora was a lad scarcely twenty years old. He was a student in the University of Geneva, where I had met him two years before. He was a handsome, well-built fellow; smiles and songs were always on his lips. In the most terrible battles he had sung. He used to say that when a man sings he has no time to think about fear, suffering, fatigue, or pain. And so he sang and sang. He was always cheerful and never complained. We all loved him. Many times I have heard the soldiers say, "We would die to save a hair of Bora's head."

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Cheda was the opposite of Bora — an older man, small, bent, always serious and quiet. He was a peasant, but naturally very intelligent, with a big heart and an idealist's soul. I never saw a braver man. In the most dreadful battles he would put his hands in his pockets and give commands to his soldiers with marvelous coolness and calmness; he never sought to shelter himself. He was a married man, with three children. I loved him, too! To Cheda and Bora I was not a commander, but a real brother.

The time came for my company to cross the bridge. The weary and careworn soldiers went silently. Perhaps they were quiet because of fatigue, pain, and hunger, or perhaps it was because *I* was very sad, worried and anxious, for I usually talked and joked with them. Bora, too, was quiet for a while, but presently he came to me, asking in a worried tone, "Why are you so gloomy?"

I could not answer him; I could not speak. My head dropped.

But the lad continued, "Where are we going?"

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"To the cemetery," I replied shortly.

He laughed. "For more than ten days we have been walking in a cemetery! Joking aside, where are we going?"

"To the cemetery, to the real cemetery, to dig up the graves!"

Bora grasped my sleeve and looked in my face, his fine eyes wide with consternation and fright. I saw that he was much overcome, and spoke quietly to him.

"I have received orders to take the position at Peaceful Hill. And that is the cemetery of Lescovatz. We are obliged to dig up the graves in order to make the trenches. Do you understand now?"

"So it is true, after all," he said. Then without waiting for my answer he ran to tell Cheda the news. In a short time the whole company knew where we were going.

As I went on ahead of my company, I could hear an angry murmur and now and then an exclamation: "This is sacrilege!" "It will bring misery to us!" "God will punish us!" "Must we dig up the dead?" "Must we take out the bones of the dead?"

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Every sentence came like a blow on my head. At the same time we fell in with the throng in the valley. We saw those who were unable to go on, who were weeping, or writhing in pain. We saw the wagons mired to the hubs in the deep mud, and it seemed to me that the men clustered round them had lost their reason, for they were shouting madly, and cruelly beating the poor exhausted horses. And then we came to those who were dying, and the dead lying in the ditches.

Three regiments had crossed the river. They were trying to move on across the valley, but the confusion and disorder in the throng was dismaying. I could not endure it any longer.

“Bring me my horse!” I called to my orderly.

After I had mounted I said to Cheda, “I am going ahead to look over my position; you bring the soldiers to the cemetery. Take care that no one stays behind.”

I spurred my horse so as to leave that hell as quickly as possible.

* * *

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How beautiful was the cemetery! How quiet it was there at Peaceful Hill!

At the crest of the hill was a large rounded plateau, quite level. The old cemetery was on this plateau. It was like a park. Wide straight paths, strewn with yellow sand, went in all directions, and above them great linden trees formed beautiful arches. Between the paths were the graves, surrounded by low borders of evergreen, or old iron fences, with monuments of black or white marble, and a low seat of stones near each grave. At each grave there was a tiny lamp, in many of which red and yellow flames burned. And everywhere were many flowers and sweet odors.

The citizens of Lescovatz had thought this hilltop would always be large enough for their cemetery; but death had been busy in poor Serbia the last five years. Because of this the cemetery had extended down the slopes in all directions; in this new part were hundreds and hundreds of new graves. There were no wide paths between these, nor high monuments of marble, nor iron fences. They were low mounds with simple wooden crosses —

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the graves of soldiers. But still each grave had its lamp, and many of the flowers which grow so quickly from tears.

I got off my horse, hitched him to a tree, and went to examine the locations where the trenches must be dug. I went first to the south side where the trenches must face the pass. When I reached this place I wanted to cry out in great joy. A wide path ran along the crest just where I must dig the trenches. Never in my life had I felt greater joy and relief. "If only it would be the same on the other side!" I said aloud to myself, as in prayer. It was easy to establish the points where the trenches were to be dug, for the whole space before the path was entirely clear; the little wooden crosses at the new graves of soldiers below were almost innumerable. Lower down were vineyards and the little cabins of the vine-growers. It was a fine place for my trenches.

Afterwards I went across to the east side, facing the valley; there all my joy and hopes vanished. Not only were there no paths, but the old and new cemeteries overlapped. While

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I was riding to the cemetery I had made up my mind that I *must* destroy the graves. But now, when the moment came that I must really do this, I felt stunned, and my brain refused to act. A cold sweat broke out upon my body; drops trickled down my forehead into my eyes and stung them. Then the words of the colonel came to my mind: "I do not defend the dead but the living." I grasped this reason as a drowning man clutches at a straw.

I examined the ground where the line for the trenches must be marked. Here I would have to destroy five old graves and two new ones; there, I would have to dig up seven new and three old ones. But, after a while, I found a line between the graves, which, though not very strategic, would not cross many graves. Only four would have to be destroyed; and of these three were old; two were very old — sunken, and so covered with grass as to be scarcely recognizable. The other old one was surrounded by a black iron fence, and a white marble monument stood near the mound, on which was chiseled in

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golden letters, "To our good Mama." There were many dead roses on the grave, but the beautiful crowns of the chrysanthemums were open.

The new grave was that of a soldier. On the mound were many flowers, and a lamp which burned in its tiny white church. On the left side the earth was pressed down by being knelt upon. At the head of the grave was a small red cross of wood with the words —

YOVAN MILICH

Died of Wounds Received
in the Battle of Kosmaj
October 2, 1915

I looked upon these two graves sadly. In one was lying a son, a soldier, a warrior, a defender of his native land. In the second a mother — the dearest being, the most holy person to her children. It came over me that I must kneel before these graves and pray. But, suddenly I looked upon myself. I was dirty, disheveled, bloodstained.

"Men like me cannot pray to God!" I said aloud. And I felt that it did not pay to live.

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By this time my company had arrived at the cemetery. The many experiences which these men had known in their unending fighting had taught them where to go and what to do as soon as they came to a new situation. But now they went hesitatingly, they stopped, they hid behind each other, and all sought to be in the rear line. They were frightened.

“Third and fourth platoons, follow me!” I said, and went to the south side. When we came to the path I said to them, “You are lucky. You will not have to dig up the graves. The trenches will go along the edge of this path. You will start at this monument and end beyond that tree. You must begin work right away and try to finish before dark. Go on, men, go on to work!”

Afterwards I came back to the first place. Some of the soldiers were going from grave to grave, reading the inscriptions and whispering among themselves. Many had laid down on the grass. Some were asleep. When I came, they all rose, and stood silently awaiting my order. It seemed to me that they

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stood before the last judgment. Bora and Cheda came to me.

"Listen!" I said to them. "You will begin at this fence, dig over this new grave and those with white monuments, and end beyond the two old graves. Begin at once. We must finish this in four hours. Come on!"

The soldiers, with shovels on their shoulders, advanced slowly and hesitatingly and stood near each other on the line I marked out. A great hulking fellow, tanned almost black, with bandaged head, the stock of whose gun bore more than thirty scratches (each scratch meant that he had killed a man), stood over the soldier's grave and with his heavy boot kicked at the earth of the mound and trampled the flowers. I would rather he had trampled on my heart.

When the soldiers were all in line, Cheda said, "Begin!"

Each man bent and began to dig at his place. Cheda came to the big soldier and quietly said to him, "You must not throw down the cross!"

"No fear, Sergeant, it's not in my way,"

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replied the giant, and struck his shovel into the mound.

I went a little farther and sat down on a bank, that I might not see.

The sun was going down. Its last red rays shone through the crowns of the lindens whose yellow and faded leaves covered the paths and the graves. The trees and monuments made long shadows on the leaf-strewn ground, which looked like a beautiful carpet of a thousand colors, rosy with the gleam of the sunset. The little lamps on the graves began to shine more brightly and weirdly. At first I heard only the strokes of picks and shovels behind me; then the soldiers began to murmur, to talk, then to call to each other, to swear, and finally to laugh. I heard a voice.

“It is not so terrible to dig here.”

“Surely, it is not. The sexton does this all his life!”

I recognized the voice as that of the giant who dug into the soldier's grave.

“Eh! How easy the shovel goes in this wet earth — like into a cheese,” said another.

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“In a cemetery the earth is always wet — with tears!” I heard Bora’s voice.

“Dig! dig!” said Cheda, in a low tone.

“Oh, yes! dig! dig!” replied Bora. “It’s all the same. If we dig in the fields, pastures, vineyards, rocks, mountains, forests, or cemeteries, it is all the same; everywhere we destroy human toil and God’s works. In every case we are sinners. In other places we throw out only stones, but here a skull. But it is all the same anyway; neither can speak, neither can feel. Dig! dig!”

Presently I saw an old man who was trying to hurry toward us. He was unable to run, but he cried out something and made signs with his hands. I rose and met him at the trench. He was very, very old, his hair was all white, his eyes were wide with horror. He tried to speak, but he had lost his breath from hurrying and no words came. He gasped for breath a few moments, stretched his hands toward the soldiers as if he wanted to make them stop, then cried: —

“What are you doing here, men?”

“Can’t you see? We’re digging trenches!”

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said Cheda in a low angry voice. He hated to be interfered with.

"But in the cemetery!" exclaimed the poor old man. "In *my* cemetery! Don't you know that I have taken care of this cemetery more than forty years? I swore before God that I would keep forever his holy things. I do not permit this. Do you understand? I do not permit you to dig here! It is impossible! From a thousand other places you choose just this to destroy!"

"Hey, cheecha, as far as you can see the trenches are dug everywhere round the town. Now understand *me*, everywhere they —" began Bora.

"I don't care!" broke out the cheecha, angrily, to Bora. "You can dig everywhere, you can destroy everything, you can do what you wish, but *not here*!"

For a moment there was silence. The soldiers stopped their work and watched to see what happened.

The old sexton, seeing this, thought that we had given up and said more gently, "Hayde, hayde dobri moye. Fly from here!"

GRAVEYARD BY THE MORAVA

“That’s impossible; we are not birds,” laughed a soldier.

“What! you will *not* go from here? You will not leave my graves in peace?”

“I beg of you, cheecha, go away,” said Cheda sternly; “go, go at once, and get out of our way.” And turning to the soldiers, he said, “Go on digging.”

The men, who were amused at this scene, began to dig, laughing. When the poor old man saw this, he screamed as if he had been wounded, and rushing to the giant who was digging at the soldier’s grave, grasped his shovel with both hands, trying to take it away from him, and crying, —

“Hae! you shall not, you shall not dig here while I am alive!”

The big soldier, from whom the devil himself could not wrest anything, held the shovel in one hand; with the other he brushed away the old man, saying, —

“Let me alone, cheecha. Let me alone, I tell you! If I had to defend such as you, certainly I would not destroy these graves; but,” pointing to the valley, “for those down

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there, I would do anything; for those I would die!”

And, knowing that he was right, in his excitement he pushed the old man so hard that he fell to the ground. I hurried to them, crying, —

“What are you doing, you fools?”

Then, for the first time, the old man saw me. He crept to me, clasped my feet with his arms, and weeping, begged me: —

“Oh, sir! sir! I beg of you, if you know God, don’t let them destroy the graves; don’t let them commit a terrible sacrilege! God will punish them!”

I bent over him and said: —

“Be reasonable, cheecha, we have to dig here. This place is a very important strategic point. If we do not defend it, the Bulgarians will enter quickly into the town and do frightful things. Serbia is dying, cheecha, her people are perishing. We have to do everything in order to save them. We must take every help. The time is coming when we must take help of the dead too. Understand, the dead have to help us now!”

GRAVEYARD BY THE MORAVA

The old sexton looked at me in amazement, as if he did not understand me. Suddenly his head drooped; he fell to the ground and wept like a child. Cheda looked at me. I gave him a sign with my head and he went to the soldiers.

“Two men here! Take that old man and carry him to his home, and say to his wife, or to anybody else, that they must leave the cemetery at once.”

Two soldiers lifted the old man, taking him under the arms, and went off. The old sexton looked as if he were dead. After going a little distance, he jerked himself away from the soldiers, straightened up and cried in a solemn voice, —

“You have to know that you dig your own grave. God will punish you! He will bury *you* to-morrow!”

Then suddenly he collapsed and fell into the arms of the soldiers, an inert mass. The men were laughing and calling, —

“Oh, we know that!”

“We came here for that!”

“At least, we know that we will have a good sexton!”

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“Be silent! Work!” said Cheda, angrily.

The soldiers became quiet and began to work again. It seemed as if I had dreamed all this, that I was not alive. I felt as if the heart and soul had gone out of me and I had neither nerves nor brain. I returned to the bank and sat down. The sun had set but it was still light. It was one of those beautiful last days of autumn, which tell us that Nature will soon die, but also give promise of a new spring-time. Alas! will the springtime ever come to poor Serbia again?

For a while the soldiers worked quietly. They saw the night coming, and as they knew that the trenches must be finished before dark, they used their last strength hurriedly. Occasionally I heard a sad, tired sigh, the sigh of a man who can no longer move. Then I would hear the voice of his friend: —

“Go, go on, bata [little brother], only for a little longer. We will have the whole night to rest!”

Then I heard a strange noise of many voices calling, —

“Hee! Bones!”

GRAVEYARD BY THE MORAVA

"How black and yellow they are!"

"How large they are! One cannot believe they are human bones!"

All of a sudden I heard an angry exclamation, the cry of a man who had endured for a long time and can no longer bear up.

"I cannot work any longer! I shall stifle! It smells horribly!"

"What? It smells!" I heard Bora's voice. "Ha, bato moj, this is no perfumer's shop, it is a cemetery; it is not the festival of Mi-Carême, it is war. Have you forgotten the days of Cerna-Bara, when we had to remain for fifteen days in our trenches, and around us lay the corpses which had rotted in the summer sun, because we could not bury them? Do you remember that?"

"I remember, but it was not as —"

"It was worse," said Cheda angrily. "It is not worth your while to complain. Better work! Dig!"

Again they were silent. Again only the stroke of the picks.

"Auh!" cried a frightened voice. "Bora, look here! A skull!"

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“A skull! Throw it up here. How terrible and cold it is! Can it be possible that this was once covered with flesh, and moved above the earth? Brothers, for a long time I have wished to act Hamlet; finally my opportunity is here. No actor would wish a better stage. But instead of applause, it is the thunder of cannon. It is more magnificent! And instead of laurels, perhaps I will get a bullet through my forehead. But it is all the same. This scene is worth death! The story is, that a khedive, throwing away his koran and his ingiales, gave liberty to all his slaves and the wives of his harem. He stood before a window and saw how these unhappy ones joyfully breathed the beautiful air of liberty. Never khedive saw a more magnificent picture! Later, he committed suicide in the great delight of his heart, with these words on his lips, ‘These scenes will not happen every day.’

“A skull! Is that a skull of a politician, a lawyer, or a buyer of land? Is that a skull of those men whom Hamlet hated and despised? No, no, it is the skull of a mother. Do you see what is written here: ‘To our good Mama!’

GRAVEYARD BY THE MORAVA

Mother! Sometimes you had heard those words, my poor skull, my good mother, and you were the happiest among human beings. Mother! She is our source of life, of nourishment, — our teacher, protector, defender, angel, love, life — our God! All this is one woman, one mother, to her children. Skull, what are you to me? Nothing but cold, dirty, dead bones. And yet, in these dark sockets were once eyes, like those of my mother, which wept with happiness when I smiled, or with pain when I but cut my little finger. Oh! dear mother's eyes! Here were the lips, like the lips of my mother, which kissed me and called me 'my angel.' Here were the cheeks, like the cheeks of my mother, which I kissed uncounted times!"

Something thrilled in my heart and soul when I heard Bora's words. I felt that his words burned me, scathed me, and kindled great pain within me; but at the same time, I felt that a strange warmth was melting the ice around my heart which had formed there during these last days of horror. It seemed to me that I wanted to listen to his words, to

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drink them in, and yet, at the same time, to close my ears to them. All the feelings which I had hidden and kept deep in my heart, this good boy, in his honesty and youth, had drawn out without pity. Never, never should one speak of *mother* in the war! When I heard the words about mother, I felt as if I could not breathe, and that I could no longer endure to hear him speak, and I called out to him, —

“Stop, Bora! Come here.”

Slowly he came over. He was pale as death.

I was frightened by his looks, and I put both hands on his shoulders, shook him and said, —

“Bora, be a man!”

He looked at me, then he smiled, opened his eyes widely, his face flushed, and in an eager and excited voice, he said to me, —

“God protect them! Is it not so?”

“Yes, Bora, God protect them!” I repeated, prayerfully; and suddenly I felt that a great hope had entered my heart. Just then the big black soldier’s voice broke in.

“Lieutenant!”

GRAVEYARD BY THE MORAVA

“What is the matter?”

“A coffin, sir, entirely new! Look! a fine red coffin! Here it is peeping out from the earth. If I dig deeper it will take more than a half of the trench. What shall I do now?”

“The trench is not deep enough,” I said to him; “dig around it and leave it exposed.”

“That is a fine idea. For a long time you have wished to have a chair in the trench. Now you will have one!”

“Fool!” said Cheda, angrily.

“It’s a fine idea, anyway!” said the big fellow, chuckling, and he began to dig.

III

THE PLACE OF THE SKULL

DARKNESS came on rapidly. The old cemetery under the lindens was entirely dark, but around it was still twilight. In the valley the white mist was lying; from the valley rose a sullen confused noise. The boom of the artillery across the river had ceased. An icy wind began to blow. In the sky the first stars glimmered, and the moon rose beyond the hill across the river, big, murky, blood-colored.

“Cheda, take care that the soldiers are through soon, and I will go to the other trench to see how much they have done.”

When I got there the men were in the trenches. They had finished. The sergeant came to me.

“We are through, sir.”

“Deep enough? The loopholes strong enough? Very well. You will send two soldiers who will hold the connection between the trenches.”

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“Yes, sir.”

“Mirko, I have nothing to say to you. You alone know what is your duty. I think we shall have a terrible battle to-morrow, but you are an old soldier and you will know how to hold your men. One thing is certain: we must stay here until the last moment.”

“I know it, sir. Where should we go from here? *This* is our place — the cemetery!” said the sergeant quietly, as if he were speaking of his fields.

I laid my hand on his shoulder.

“I know you are a brave man. We shall trust in God!”

Slowly I returned to the other position. The soldiers were in the trenches. They were quietly talking to each other, and one could see the glimmer of cigarettes. Bayonets protruded here and there from the deep trenches and glistened in the moonlight. Cheda was sitting near, his head sunk between his shoulders, his *shikatcha* drawn over his ears.

“The machine-guns have come?” I asked him.

“Yes, sir.”

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“Have you put them as I said — two at the right side of the trenches, and one at the left?”

“Yes, sir. What do you think of to-morrow?”

“If they have enough artillery, it will be bad. But if they do not, then we will kill them as the hail kills field-mice!”

“I think so too, sir.”

“Where is Bora?” I asked him after a while.

“There he is in the trench, sitting on the coffin.”

“What?”

“Sitting on the coffin, dreaming as usual. The soldier was right in saying the coffin is a real chair.”

The wind began to blow more strongly. It was very cold.

“Let’s go down, Cheda; it will be warmer there. To-morrow you will be at the left wing of the trench. Bora and I will stay at the right, but to-night we can be together.”

Then we went down into the trench, into the cold, wet, nauseating graves. Some of the soldiers were sitting in the trench; others were

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lying on the wet ground, sleeping; others were standing with their heads leaning against the wall of the trench, their guns between their feet and held against their breasts. Standing thus, they were sleeping with open mouths. Their only rest for the whole night! How terribly pale their faces, and how ghastly in the moonlight! How like the faces of the dead!

We found Bora sitting on the coffin, but he got up when we came.

“What! are you sitting on a corpse?” said Cheda grimly.

“I tell you it does not feel, and the heart in my breast does not feel,” answered Bora very seriously.

I sat down on the coffin, trying to be calm, but I felt a cold shudder run from my feet up my back and stiffen my neck. I tried to throw off my thoughts. I tried to calm myself. But my thoughts ran on. I was never wider awake. I thought: “I am sitting in a grave upon a corpse! I do not remember that I ever read or heard of anything like this. Can it be true? Can it be reality? Perhaps I am sick and this whole day is only the hallucina-

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tion of a fever." But a gust swept in on us from the valley the distant sound of screams of pain, cries, and curses, which told me that it was all true.

Suddenly Bora clutched my hand. I turned round to him. The moonlight shone in his face, which was pale and haggard. His lips were quivering, his hand was outstretched, pointing to something beyond the trench. I saw that he wished to tell me something, but he could not; the words stuck in his throat.

"For Heaven's sake, what is the matter with you, Bora? Why are you so frightened?"

"What ails him again?" said Cheda, who was sitting beside me with his head between his knees.

"Do you believe in ghosts?" said Bora, whispering and shivering.

"What?"

"In ghosts, in spirits?"

"Certainly a soldier is passing through the cemetery," said Cheda.

"No! no, I am not crazy. Please get up and look," said Bora, pulling me to my feet.

At the same time the soldiers began to

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wake, to whisper, to get up. I looked out of the trench. A black shadow! It was moving round the old cemetery; from time to time it appeared in the moonlight which filtered through the lindens. It seemed to me to be very large. The soldiers became more restless.

“Be silent!” I cried to them.

Now the shadow emerged from the old cemetery. It was entirely in the moonlight. I saw it was a woman. She moved very quickly. She bent often, as though looking for something. Once in a while she would straighten herself, and we could hear her moan. As she came quite close to us we could hear her speaking to herself: “There is the grave of Mara, — there of friend Paya, — here of Caya, and here must be *his*!” All of a sudden she screamed (oh, a terrible scream!) and fell upon what was left of the new grave of the soldier.

“It is dug up, — it is broken down, destroyed!” exclaimed the poor creature, writhing with grief, stretching her arms over the mound. “Why have you dug up his grave?”

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He gave his young life for his country, but it is not yet enough; now he cannot have his rest. Why did you not find my heart to dig up rather than his grave? Why did you not first kill me? Yaoy, Yaoy! All destroyed! Have you removed his coffin, have you taken him out, have you opened those terrible wounds on his dead body? Have you —?”

And not knowing what she was doing, she stumbled into the trench. We caught her and put her down near the coffin.

“Here is the coffin,” said Cheda, almost inaudibly.

She kneeled on the ground and quickly felt over the coffin with her hands, whispering many times, “Here it is, here it is!” Then she shrieked again, fell on the coffin and began to embrace and kiss it, trembling in her whole body. Never in my life had I heard such cries. Soon they grew less and less and died away in a shuddering moan. Suddenly she weakened, her arms slipped to the ground, and she fell, her head striking on the coffin.

Bora drew in his breath with a sharp hissing sound. “Dead!” he whispered.

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Cheda ran to the woman first and raised her. Her shawl fell from her head and we could see her gray silvery hair. On her forehead was a great red bruise. Her eyes were closed.

"She breathes," said Cheda; "give her water."

I took a canteen and bathed her forehead and temples.

The soldiers crowded round us. I could hear them whispering. "That's a mother!" "Poor woman!" "Poor mothers — all of ours!"

Finally the woman moved, and opened her eyes. Oh, dear mother's eyes, how red and swollen they were! For a long time she looked round her; and then, as consciousness returned, she again put her arms around the coffin, placed her head upon it, and whispered in the faintest of voices, "My son, my dear son, my tender child! Did they hurt you?"

"Is that your son?" asked Bora.

"Yes, my son, my only one. He was my hope, my happiness, my life. When I lost him I could not live myself. I did not love the

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sun, I had *his* eyes; I did not admire the flowers or smell them, I had his rosy cheeks and his hair; I did not love the sky, I had his forehead; I did not love the honey or sweetness of life, I listened to his voice; I did not care for the whole world, I had his gentle hands and his heart of gold! Oh, I had him, my only one, and that is all. He was my life. I loved him so much that now I cannot love sun, flowers, sky, world, life. All these were in him. *I cannot, I cannot!*” cried the poor mother in superhuman grief; and began to weep again.

It was more than terrible! It was inconceivable! The soldiers all left their places and gathered round us, round this poor mother. Cheda rose and motioned to them to go away. They went slowly back to their places. For a time I heard them talk and whisper, but soon they grew silent; only the mother still wept. Presently she rose, took my hand, and in a frightened voice, said: —

“Will you destroy his grave entirely? Will you really take him out that the dogs may eat him? Oh, no, no! I will not permit it. *I* am here. I am here to defend you, my dear

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little heart!" cried the poor woman, clasping the coffin as if she wanted to take it to her breast and carry it somewhere far away.

Bora knelt beside her, lifted her, embraced her gently, and said to her tenderly, nearly in tears:—

"No! good mother, we will not take out his coffin. On the contrary, we are here to defend it. We love your son too. He was a soldier, a warrior, a defender; he was our friend."

The mother looked at Bora a few moments, astonished, with wide-open eyes, as if she did not understand him. Then she took his head in her hands and began to kiss him passionately, — on his hair, on his forehead, his cheeks, eyes, chin, — saying: —

"Oh, I know it. Yes, you are his friend, his comrade. You are a soldier as he was. And you too have a mother, who is now weeping as I am. You are all my children. Yes, yes, you are the same as he was, only he is dead, and you, perhaps, will be to-morrow. Oh my poor children! Have we borne you for this? Have we suffered, we mothers, so much, to lose you when we love you the most? Do not

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interrupt me. I know what you want to say. 'Our native country is calling. We have to defend it, and defending it, we defend you, our mothers; thus we pay our debts.' Oh, I know it. I too thought it was so. The day when I parted with him, I did not weep. He said to me, 'Do not weep, mother; be proud that you have a soldier son. You have kept me and cared for me more than twenty years. Now the time has come when I can defend you, and I will defend you, my good mother. Be happy!'

"And he went with a song on his lips, happy in his strength and youth. I was proud.

"Right away after, I went to a hospital. I wanted to be truly worthy of my son. I took care of the wounded and kissed them, for in caressing them I thought that I caressed *my* boy. He wrote to me often. He was happy and content. He always begged me not to worry too much, for he felt that my love defended him.

"One day — O God, God! One day, when I came to the hospital, I found another

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wounded soldier. His head was bandaged and he was lying perfectly still. I went closer to the bed. Suddenly I screamed and fell on the floor; I recognized my son. Oh, I cannot tell you all! His face was black, his eyes closed, and around them it was all blue and red. I kissed him, I spoke to him, I called him, I shook him. Slowly he raised his swollen eyelids, and showed his beautiful eyes from which he would never see any more, and a low painful groan came from his lips. Oh, my poor child! He had lost his sight and speech. Oh, I cannot tell you all.

“One morning I went into the bandage-room when they dressed his wounds. He had no hair; his beautiful hair was shaved entirely off. Around his head was a wide-open gash • from which the blood was running. O God, God! When the doctor pressed his head, his fingers sunk into the skin as if there was no bone beneath! Yaoy! He died after a few days. He was never conscious. Oh, how terrible it was! I was insane with grief. He died in my arms without knowing that these were the hands of his mother which he loved so

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much and kissed so often. O my children, can you not see how unhappy I am? I am not angry at my native country. I, too, love my country. But when my son has died for it, I too must die. It is not life for a mother without her children. We mothers are useless for this world without our children. Oh, if I were the only mother who is weeping now, it would be nothing; but there are a million mothers who are weeping to-day. We will flood the whole world with our tears, with our mourning garments we will darken the sun, and with our sorrows we will poison life. O God! I beg you to kill me! I *will not* live without him, without my son, my heart, my soul!"

The poor woman ceased speaking, and began to weep sadly. We were silent. The hush of death fell.

* * *

Who can tell how long we sat there, dumb and stiff? It was terribly cold, but we did not feel it. The icy wind had blown dirt and dead leaves into our trenches, but we did not pay any attention to this; the dreadful sounds from

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the valley we did not hear; we were sitting in graves, but did not realize it; we were so near to death, yet no one was frightened! No one wished to think of the black present, or of the appalling future. It was impossible to think, for one would become insane. Every one, perhaps for the last time, was sunk in thoughts of the past. Every one had, perhaps for the last time, drawn from his sick heart dear and tender memories. Every one remembered beautiful past days, when everybody was so happy, when the sun always shone, and the world was full of love.

Suddenly, in the distance before us, beyond the valley, a terrible light flamed out, as if the world was burning. Immediately a tremendous detonation shook the ground. This brought us back to reality. The mother, startled, asked: —

“What’s that?”

“Our troops have at last crossed the Morava and blown up the bridge,” said Bora. Then he added seriously, looking at me, “Now, the anvil is to feel the hammer-strokes.”

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The seriousness of the present moment came over me. I bent over the mother and said to her tenderly: —

“Now, mother, you have to go.”

She looked at me a moment and then she said with a bitter smile: —

“What! go from here? Where? For nothing on earth will I go. I cannot leave *him* alone.”

“But, good mother, you *have* to go from here. The battle will soon be on; soon there will be death here,” said Bora.

“That is what I want,” said the poor mother in a whisper.

I was frightened and anxious. “If she really will not go from here!” I thought. “A woman in the trench! If she were to die! Oh, no, no, it is impossible, unheard-of! It cannot be.” I took her hands and said firmly, “Mother, I beg you to go. Go to your home.”

“Home? We mothers have no homes when our children are no longer there. Then, for us, a grave is our home. I am in it.”

“I beg you, mother, my dear mother, be reasonable. It is impossible. Come now, can't

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you see —” begged poor Bora, kissing her hands.

“How, impossible? It is very natural. I am not insane. I know very well what I am doing, and I do not ask that which is impossible. O my dear children! Can’t you see that my son is again weak, frail, feeble, and little as when he was born? Can’t you see that again he needs my help and my defense?”

“But *we* are here to defend him!”

“What do you know about little children? Nothing. Only a mother can help here. O my dear children, let me stay here.”

Suddenly she grasped my hands, fell on her knees and implored me: —

“O my son, my dear son, please understand me. I am a miserable woman. I have lost my only little one, but you can bring me happiness — yes, happiness — if you will let me die beside him.”

I stood confused. For the first time in my life I felt what it means when the mind ceases to act. Truly I knew nothing of myself; I felt only that the wild, quick, emotional throbs of my heart said, “Let her stay, let her stay.”

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Cheda, who stood waiting, now came up.

“Mother, you *must* go from here!”

“What? I must? I must? Never! What is the power that can send me from here? Who is the wretch who will take a mother from her only little one? Who is this cruel one? Who is this monster? We mothers are the kindest beings, but if somebody dares to hurt our little birds, then we strike, we bite, we scratch! Do you hear? We bite, we scratch!” cried the poor mother, with changed voice and frightened eyes, with outstretched hands, showing her nails.

Cheda lost his temper.

“The woman is crazy,” he said. “Two soldiers here!”

“What are you doing?” I asked him.

“I will order them to take this woman away.”

“Sergeant, go to your place!” I said to him sharply.

For the first time I was Cheda’s commanding officer. He looked at me, astonished, then straightened up, gave me the regular salute, and said in a firm voice: —

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"I understand, sir," and went to the left wing of the trench.

The mother remained. I never can describe her happiness. To-day, I thought, a human life is as cheap as a rusty *parica*, and the smallest pleasure is so expensive. Now an opportunity was given to me to give the greatest pleasure, and I gave it. I gave it to a Serbian mother.

* * *

The night dragged its endless length along. The first streaks of dawn were appearing, when suddenly, over the river, somewhere in the blue mountains, there rang out a shot, then another, a third, a fourth. Then came faint whistles, and again four shots somewhere on the right. The soldiers jumped, leaned on the wall of the trench, and grasped their guns. It was beginning.

The worst moments come at the beginning of the battle. The soldiers are like drunken men in darkness. Nothing is known, and no one will show his position first. But to-day the fighting developed very quickly. The

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Bulgarians, proud of their victories, wished to be "entirely quit with their brothers" at once, and they began to shoot from all points with their artillery, following the German tactics: "wipe out first all before you and then march through the cleared place."

At first I laughed at their wild shooting, for the shower of shells exploded far from us. But it grew serious. It seemed to me as if a muddy, turgid river, a raging flood, was rising up to swamp us. At first the Bulgarians had directed their fire only at the valley, wasting their ammunition. Or perhaps they wanted to clear their way through the valley by throwing aside the dead in it. Then they moved their fire to the pass, and then to the town. Nothing could be more appalling than to hear the hissing of the shells, which, as they flew through the pass like wild horses, lost their clear whistling sound, and became dull heavy thunder that shook the ground. Shortly after, behind us, over the hill back of the old cemetery, rose a thick black smoke.

"They have set the town on fire, the black devils!" said Bora.

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"*We* are their sure victims, but the people in the town might fly, and so they want to finish them first," I said, trembling with anger and rage.

"You see now that it is better that I remain here," said the mother with a sad smile.

Suddenly, before we expected, they turned their fire on the hills at both sides of the pass. It seemed to me as if the mouths of many wild beasts had opened and snarled at the same time. And the sound came toward us like a shrill screech, as when the ocean wind blows through the rigging of a lonely ship. At the same moment, the shells exploded with dreadful rapidity everywhere around us. We were deafened by the detonations. Immediately after, the wind blew a thick stinging smoke into the trench, which bit our eyes and suffocated us. And from all directions fell earth and dry leaves.

At the same time a black line rose from the bed of the river. The Bulgarians had crossed the Morava. Perhaps they had crossed last night and were hidden somewhere along the shore of the river. The line seemed

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endless, and thin as a thread. It moved quickly through the valley. I grasped the telephone: —

“Hello! Fourth Battery!”

It seemed as if a hundred men had spoken at the same time at the telephone.

I cried as loudly as I could: —

“Hello! Fourth Battery!”

“Here!” answered a voice.

I continued in the same loud tone: —

“Direction river — forty-five hundred metres. Try with two cannon with a correction of two hundred metres.”

“Don’t worry,” answered the same voice.

After a few moments something thundered terribly behind us and whistled over our heads — something which flew through space, rending the air. At the same time something, like a sack full of sand, struck us in our backs so powerfully that we staggered. Our artillery had begun to fire. I took my field-glasses and looked into the valley. Two little white puffs of smoke showed there — one of them just over the black line.

Again I took the telephone: —

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“Fourth!”

“Yes.”

“Correction excellent! Now to the right and the left from this point!”

It looked as though the gate of hell had opened wide behind us. The white smoke wreaths appeared with great rapidity over the black line. The ranks swerved, wavered, and broke into many small parts. Some of these parts were lost in the smoke; some were leveled to the ground; all the others ran forward. From the right side of the pass our artillery opened up fire, working confusion in the Bulgar ranks; but the dark line quickly came into the dead angle for our artillery.

Another line rose from the river. It appeared to me that the Bulgarians had directed all their cannon toward our Peaceful Hill, trying to find our battery. The shells struck the old cemetery, working tremendous havoc. The lindens were torn out by the roots and hurled into the air, the large stones of the monuments were cracked in pieces, and reduced to dust. The air was filled with min-

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gled leaves and earth, and everything shook and trembled in that awful destruction.

The second wave of the Bulgar attack met the same fate as the first, but though disordered, broken, and massed in small parts, it made its way across the valley. Suddenly the men of their first line rose from among the bushes, stones, and grass at the foot of our hill. When did they creep up?

Our outposts at the bottom of the hill retreated little by little up the slope.

“Quick firing! eight hundred metres!” I shouted.

Bora ran along the trench crying the same. An unspeakable booming and crashing began.

Just then the third black line rose from the river. “Orderly!” I cried, as loudly as I could, turning toward the old cemetery. A soldier, who had been hidden behind a grave not far away, crept toward me like a serpent. He was black with earth and leaves, and streams of dirty sweat ran down his face.

“Go tell the men at the machine-guns that I cannot come to give the order to fire.”

The soldier crept away.

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Presently the machine-guns began firing. The sound was like that of a hundred *klep-
alas* being struck at the same moment. The bullets began to fly toward us. They came in millions, literally covering every foot of earth. The earth in front of the trench looked like a corn-popper. They flew all around our heads, close to our ears, like hissing, stinging serpents, striking with deadly venom.

Our fire and that of the machine-guns quickly forced the first line back, and held the second one stationary. A swarm of shells flew over our trench. It was like a whirlwind of fire; it was as if the air had become a fluid in which stones, earth, trees, leaves, clothes, guns, parts of bodies, human flesh and blood boiled and mingled, splashing from all sides those who were yet alive. We were as in a great kettle of surging horror. Our ears felt as if hot oil had been poured into them; our mouths were dry, open, and full of dirt. Our minds were stunned. Everywhere sounded a tumult of breaking bones, crashing, crackling, splitting — indescribable disorder and dreadful horror. Then, above the roar of

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bombs, rang out heart-rending screams, shrieks of agony, calls for help, and the groans of the dying.

I ran through the trench encouraging the soldiers. Oh, the unspeakable scenes that I faced!

One of my men lay in the bottom of the trench. His head was a crushed and bloody mass mingled with the earth. The big black fellow who dug up the soldier's grave had stepped upon this dead body without knowing it in his excited shooting; with every movement of his great boots the dark red blood flowed afresh from the crushed body.

A little farther, a soldier raised his left hand from his gun. It was fearfully burned by the red-hot barrel. He looked at his black and swollen hand, smiled indifferently, grasped his gun again, and began to fire.

Still farther, a soldier was leaning against the wall of the trench, apparently sitting quietly there. When I looked closely, my hair rose, my breath stopped. His eyes were glazed, his mouth open and filled with earth; his breast did not move. Both legs had been

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entirely shot away and his body remained leaning against the wall like a doll.

Another man was lying on his arm against the trench. He looked as if he were asleep.

"Shoot!" I said and shook him.

He fell. He was dead.

The wounded were the most heartrending. There were so many, and they were everywhere! Some were sitting in the trench, whimpering and trying to bind their wounds, from which the blood ran and fell upon their uniforms. Those who were standing stepped on their bodies, but they were past feeling.

* * *

Still the battle raged on and came to its culmination. The pure air of God had become close and dark as in a cave, through which ran a fiery river of melted iron in which terrible explosions boomed and thundered.

Those who lived were still firing. In the smoke and confusion they looked like large, black, bloody phantoms. Their faces were distorted, and streams of sweat ran down their cheeks. Their eyes were wide, glittering,

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and terrible. They were like stones. Did they breathe? I did not know, but they stood and fired.

Stepping over the dead and wounded, crying I know not what, I returned to the old place and looked for the mother. Why had I left her? The thought flashed through my head and I felt something clutch my throat. She had covered the coffin with her shawl and was leaning over it, her face hidden in her arms.

Bora was at the right wing of the trench. When he saw me coming through the smoke and dust he ran toward me. He was, as always in battle, smiling, singing, but very pale. He waved his hands to me, shouting something I could not hear.

Then, suddenly, between him and me something turned white, flashed like lightning, and exploded frightfully, as if the world had split in two. Something struck me heavily on my breast, threw me down, and flew above me. A dazzling light shone before my eyes for an instant, and then darkness —

“It is nothing, sir! A little bruise! Why,

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it's only a joke!" said the big soldier, lifting me. "But Bora —" he added.

This brought me to my senses, as a dash of icy water.

"Bora!" I cried.

I leaped to my feet and ran down the trench. Through the smoke, dust, and ruin I saw him.

There are moments in our lives so horrible, so incomprehensible, so unspeakably terrible, that we have no feelings with which to understand or define them. And yet they are forever before our eyes.

Bora was lying in the arms of the poor mother. A soldier held his head, which was nearly severed from his body. A dreadful wound gaped upon his neck; his whole body seemed so crushed, so shattered, that only his clothing held it together. The mother was dumb, stiff and rigid as a stone. She scarcely breathed. She fixed a constant staring look upon the wound, as if she could stanch the blood with it. Her face was frightfully changed, all twisted and contorted with horror. Poor, poor mother! What did you think

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at this moment? What had your suffering mother's heart felt? Oh, if you could tell this to the world, perhaps the world would change, would be different; perhaps it would be beautiful!

Bora did not die at once. Oh, the unhappy boy! In him was so much life, virile youth, so much strength and force, that death itself stopped before him. His beautiful eyes were still open but forever dead. His hair was wet with blood. A thin stream of blood ran from his nostrils. His mouth opened to make a path for his beautiful soul.

I howled like a wounded tiger; I jumped, raging as if insane and not knowing what I did. I kicked with all my strength at the earth before the trench. There is no need for any shelter now. Something terrible surged within my breast! It is impossible that they were *men* who did this. Why then should I be a man?

"Shoot! Kill, kill!" I cried hysterically. Then I seized a gun, but it seemed so little, so small before my rage, pain, desperation, and horror that I threw it away. I wished at

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that moment that I might have the thunder of Jupiter, with which, in one stroke, I could destroy all the murderers of my friend.

The battle raged on. Truly there was no air! All was changed, destroyed, heated! Those who were alive hardly knew if they were alive. Suddenly, in the midst of this boom and thunder, rose a terrible shouting from the valley, which sounded above everything else for a moment. There are no words or power to describe that sound. One might say that the devils in hell were singing! It was the howl of man when he becomes wild, enraged — when he yearns to drink hot blood.

In the smoky valley, there were no more black lines, but an immense black mass, which ran toward us like a flood —

“Oorah, ooraaa-h!” the yells rang out everywhere. So cry men who flesh their bayonets.

A strange sound came to me. For a moment I stood like a stone, then turned quickly. In the same moment the mother let go of Bora and fell. I ran and lifted her. From two

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places on her head ran blood, red blood on the white hair!

“Mother, mother, are you wounded?”

A happy smile passed over her face. Then, in a weak voice, “I am happy! I knew that I would not be separated from my son for long! Now we will be again together forever. Oh, forever to be with him! Here, I am coming, my little one!” And weakly she embraced the coffin and put her head on it. From her white hair the blood ran onto the coffin.

I leaned my head against the wall of the trench and was silent. I do not know if I breathed. I did not feel.

After a short time the mother lifted herself with great pain. Then slowly she unbuttoned her dress and put her hand in her bosom. Immediately she drew it out. The hand was covered with blood. Only then I saw that she was shot in the breast too. She lifted her hand and looked at the blood on it for a moment.

I felt my teeth chatter. The mother said, in a wonderfully clear voice:—

“I have given to this world my greatest

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sacrifice, my only one. But it was not enough. Now I give my blood, my life. Oh! I give them very freely, but only, I beg you, kill each other no more!"

She clasped her bloody hands and the tears fell from her eyes. Suddenly she grew weak. The mother's last task was accomplished! She was no longer useful to this world! With her last effort she raised herself and fell upon the coffin.

Then I did not understand her words. *Now* I understand them very, very well.

Then I saw a terrible picture. Bora was lying at the bottom of the trench, in darkness, in dust, in filth, mingling the blood of his wounds with vile earth, cut, crushed, terrible, and horrible. The mother died beside her dead son, killed by the enemy's bullet. It seemed to me that Serbia had died, too. It seemed to me that I looked on the death of Serbia and her children in the death of this mother and this son!

With one leap I was out of the trench. There is no more trench, no more shelter, no more world, no man, no humanity! Nothing

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but raging lions waiting, and beasts, who, growling, are ascending the hill.

What had been the new cemetery became very quickly an old one, for a third one, newer and much larger, had been created.

IV

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FOUR big fires warmed the miserable remnants of my company in this freezing night. Around each one were about ten soldiers sitting closely and lying against each other, bending with outstretched hands which looked very large in the firelight. In the red, bearded faces the eyes glittered strangely, full of tears from pain, heat, smoke, and wind. They were so close to the fire that their faces, hands, chests, and knees were burned, and yet they shivered; now and then, amidst the crackling of the fire, one could hear their teeth chatter: the icy wind, with raging shriek, swept pitilessly over their backs, stiffening their necks, freezing their ears, and stabbing their sides like a knife. It is terrible when these two extremes meet on one tired body, when one side is burning and the other freezing. One had but to feel this to realize what hell is.

For five days, since the battle of Lescovatz,

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we had had no chance to sleep, and, though this night was the first opportunity, no one had closed his eyes. Up to this time we had felt our national calamities; and weariness, misery, and hunger had crucified us; still, we could endure all these and live, and could eat, and sleep. But now had come something worse, something much more unbearable, more powerful than the yoke of natural laws which bind men. Now, something much more threatening and terrible hung over these four fires. It was the spirit of unyielding tragedy. Not only the spirit of the cruelty of one nation, which had destroyed the liberty of five million people, but the spirit which had broken the faith of those people and crushed their hearts and killed their hopes. Serbia's soldiers had to-day for the first time *fled*; this was the crowning disaster. One must know the Serbian soldier in order to understand the full effect of this upon him.

The Serbians had always fought for the liberty and happiness of their brothers. For four years they had won magnificent victories from Kumanovo to Monastir, from Priz-

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rend to Scutari, from Prilep to the Adriatic Sea; they had captured Papaz-Tepe at Adrianople; they had said to the "Chessar"¹ from Cer, Yadar, Rudnik, Kosmaj, and Belgrade that his idea of *Strafexpedition* was quite wrong; they had said to the Bulgarians, "For Slivnica, Bregalnica"; and, though attacked on all sides, they had defended with superhuman strength their ideals and their honor.

Now, to-day, for the first time, they had *fled!* This, then, was the dark spirit which hovered over these four fires, which simply numbed every natural law; the spirit which caused these poor, half-dead men not to feel that the coat on their elbows was burning, that from their unkempt bodies the sweat was running, and that the skin on their necks was cracking open in the icy wind.

This night for the first time I quite understood the words of a peasant soldier, who said to me while dying in my arms: "When a *man* is dying, perhaps society is guilty, but when

¹ The name which Serbian people apply to the Emperor of Austria.

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a nation is dying, certainly *humanity* is guilty!" Bitterly I felt the tragic fate of my country. I knew the struggles and work of mankind of the last century, their democratic ideals, and I thought that this great humanity will not be indifferent to these tragedies, nor permit its greatness to be diminished by the miserable cruelty of one of its members. It is impossible!¹

This night was more terrible for me than for my soldiers. Events had given to me a heavy task and many responsibilities. I looked at these remnants of my company with great pain, sorrow, and fear. Besides, I was now alone; excepting Sergeant Trailo, not one of my sergeants remained. And, finally, I did not have any longer my Cheda. The loss of him made my unhappiness almost unsupportable. Absolutely I could not reconcile myself to the loss of Cheda. For many reasons I had loved this sergeant of mine. He was so good and gentle. He was from the heart of

¹ The best proof that humanity is not an empty phrase and that "Deutschland über alles" could not exist in this century is this, that to-day the whole world is against Germany.

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Serbia, from the part of the country most celebrated in our songs. I always took him as an example, as a type of my nation. I had entered into battle for the first time with him. He had helped me so many times, freely, from his whole heart, sacrificing his most precious things, and he had risked his life many times to save mine. And, from the time my captain was wounded and I became the commander of my company, Cheda helped me very much in this difficult duty, with his knowledge, his great energy, and the valuable experiences of an old soldier. And then I truly loved him, and those that we love we always want close beside our hearts never to be lost.

The worst part was, that I did not know what had happened to him. After we had retreated from Lescovatz, we had fought at the position of Dobra-Glava for three days, retreating slowly and successfully. This last night we had come to Stubla, a little village. The positions around Stubla were very unfortunate for us; there was a chain of bare hills, which went from Bele-Crkve to Bošhniak, and beyond this was the valley of Poosta-

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Reka, the last valley in all this part of Serbia. The work of my division, which, since Lescovatz, had conducted itself so finely, was to hold this valley until all our refugees, the army, and the trains of equipment should have crossed the passes of Medveja and Lebana, and arrived in safety. Afterwards we would, according to plans, cross the valley during the night, enter into the mountains, pass Lebane, and arrive in the rocky part of southern Serbia, where we could retreat slowly and safely, imposing upon the enemy heavy losses. We had made this plan at our headquarters, and up to this night, when we came to Stubla, it had developed successfully.

But this night the Bulgarians, finding that their advance from Lescovatz was a failure, suddenly changed their tactics. Fifteen miles south of Lescovatz, near Vladichin Han, they crossed the Morava with large forces and very speedily advanced through the valley of Yablaniza toward Medveja. We heard of this about midnight, and it was like thunder from a clear sky to us. Right away came

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the order that two regiments of my division should immediately cross the Pusta River and hasten to Medveja. This was done at two o'clock, leaving at Stubla only the Fourteenth and my regiment to defend a position of ten miles. Two regiments¹ to fight six of the enemy's! The situation was dreadful! With the loss of two regiments the commander of my division had to make new arrangements, and we had only time to dig small and shallow trenches. The fighting began at five o'clock in the morning.

As always, Cheda commanded the left wing, and I the right. The battle was such that a soldier of mine, an old warrior, a real giant, who had always said in any fighting, "Nothing! Nothing! It's only mild!" now exclaimed, "Auh! It is hot!"

The Bulgarians acted quickly. Informed of the success of the southern army, they wished to push us into the valley, and here, between Medveja, Lebana, and Prokuplie, to hold us, so that they could, later, with the help of the Germans and Austrians, who were

¹ Both regiments had lost half their men.

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coming from the north, capture alive many of our divisions. The fighting was dreadful, the day unforgettable, the conditions terrible, and fate without pity. At ten o'clock, thanks to our unfortunate position, the Bulgarians succeeded in passing to our flank with their mountain artillery. At half-past ten the ammunition of our artillery was entirely gone, at eleven, that of my soldiers; and right away the Bulgarians made an assault.

Now came the time when more than three thousand men must choose one of three dreadful possibilities; to be made prisoners, to commit suicide, or to fly. All three were equally terrible, and up to this time no Serbian soldier had chosen any one of these. To be slaves! A bitter laugh of derision rose. To commit suicide! This would take too much time. To fly! The next moment two regiments ran into the valley to a fearful fate.

In this chaos I did not see Cheda. I had to pass with my two platoons through the village. When the Bulgarians saw the soldiers in the village, their blinding rage was such that they threw aside the most elemen-

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tary rules of humanity. Paying no attention to the white cloths which hung over every door, they began to throw hundreds of shells at the poor village, destroying without pity the roofs which sheltered mothers and children . . . These miserable people, saving themselves from the ruin, smoke and flame, ran in all directions, wild with fear, terror, wounds, and pain. They screamed so that it overcame the thunder of shells, the crackling of flames, the falling of roofs, and the wild shrieks of the Bulgarians who were rushing on . . .

Close to the village the river flowed. It was deep, wide, icy, and muddy. There was no time to seek a bridge. We threw ourselves into the river. The freezing waters came up to the chest and neck. The little ones fell and were carried away by the current. The weak and overtired were dead before they reached the river . . .

Beyond the river was the valley, which seemed to me without end, full of white smoke puffs, because the shells of the Bulgarians were exploding everywhere. The

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dreadful cold of the river had stiffened our legs, and our wet clothes, which began to freeze, were heavy as lead. We could no longer run, but bravely stumbled on. Thus going, one man screamed and fell, and others struck their foreheads against the frozen earth without a sound.

“Cavalry!” exclaimed a frightened voice. At the left side of the valley a long line came rapidly toward us. We held our breath. Then from all sides came the cry, “Cavalry!” There was wild confusion. Again we tried to run. The frozen clothing crackled, and the sweat streamed from our bodies. I had to stop quickly; I could no longer move; my strength was entirely gone. Afterwards I despised this play of destiny, giving us this paltry moment in which, a hundred times, to save our lives! We did not wish to be slaves, we had cast aside the thought of suicide, and so threw ourselves, with our last strength, against a cruel fate; and now will happen something worse, we have to be crushed and broken by the rack! One of my old soldiers who was always beside me

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stopped too. His clothes were white with ice. His face was distorted by the tremendous bitterness of an awful moment. He stared into the dim heavens, he spread out his red, cracked, and bloody hands, shaking his fist toward the sky, and from his breast came a bitter, vehement exclamation: —

“God! God! Thou art not God!”

Suddenly, right before us, there was a terrible roar. We staggered. “Surrounded!” flashed through my mind. Oh, no! With raging whistle and deafening roar the shells flew over our heads and fell beyond us, making havoc. *Our* artillery is in action! I could not explain this to myself! For a moment a hush fell in the air. The Bulgarians had suddenly become silent. It was too unexpected. A moment and the volcano before us again burst into flame. At the left side, where we had first seen the cavalry, we saw chaos; a moment after, the white smoke covered all. The shriek behind us was choked, and we again began to breathe.

The soldier, who had cried out against God, was struck dumb in the rapid happenings of

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these few moments. He stood open-mouthed, swaying like a tree in a strong wind. Suddenly he fell on his knees, looked up at the obscured sky, stretched out the same red hands toward it, and said in low tones: —

“God! I thank Thee!”

We retreated quietly to Zlata. We came here about four o'clock in the afternoon; we made fires, melting and drying our clothes. Our clothing had melted, but our hearts remained icy. My thoughts were as black as this night. How is it with Cheda? This question returned to me again and again with hard persistence. I could give no answer and my heart was torn by the pain.

* * *

Just at the moment when I took out my watch to see what time it was, I heard voices in the night. In a moment my fire lit red figures which came closer.

“Good-evening!” said Cheda, in a serious voice, as usual. For a moment I remained dumb. Then I jumped up with amazement, ran to him and embraced him. I felt that he

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was shaking and I was sobbing. Perhaps only my mother, if I ever see her again, shall I embrace so warmly and so tenderly. It was the embrace of two loyal friends in which, at the same time, were mingling the tears of a father and of a son.

“Are you not wounded? Are you not deathly tired? How many soldiers have you brought? How many were killed? How many drowned? What is the news?” I asked him hurriedly, impatiently, for a hundred questions burned upon my lips.

This restored him. For a moment he straightened himself, took a full breath of icy air, sighed deeply, and again became that old man, serious, silent, quiet, little, and bent. Afterwards he slowly wiped his eyes with one hand. Then I noticed that he held something under his coat with his other hand.

“They only touched me slightly on the left arm. It’s nothing! I am good, if such a word has any worth to-day! I bring about twenty soldiers . . . No one was drowned . . . I passed over the bridge . . . All others were killed or perished. There is much news . . .”

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He spoke gloomily. I could see that it was not this which interested him now. "But first of all . . ."

"What is this under your coat?" I interrupted.

"This is what I want to tell you about first of all," he said with suddenly changed voice. "Here, see!" he whispered and then threw open his coat.

Between his legs a child was standing, leaning its head against his body. It looked around with wide-open, frightened eyes.

"A child!" I exclaimed.

"I found it in the road half dead," said Cheda sadly. Never had I seen him so depressed.

The soldiers who were sitting by the fires got up, made a large circle around my fire, looking with great interest and wonder at this little one, paying no attention to their shivering. Many were barefooted, because they had taken off their shoes in order to dry them around the fire. The soldiers whom Cheda brought were standing beyond him, silent, with red faces and drooping heads

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over which the bayonets glittered in the dark night.

Cheda took the child tenderly, made it sit down by the fire, and stood over it, motionless. The little one, in great pain, stretched his small frozen hands toward the fire. Long, disheveled hair, all mingled with frozen mud, fell upon his thin shoulders. He had no coat nor cap, and his clothes were torn. On the thin little neck was tied a large, dirty shawl. His little muddy, stiffened toes protruded through entirely worn-out shoes. It must be that they gave him dreadful pain, for he held them with both hands and began to rub them. Then he bent his little head still lower . . . suddenly, without a sound or sigh or moan, the large tears, oh, so many, began to fall from his eyes upon the dirty shawl which hung around his neck. I felt, too, that the tears came to my eyes, that my sight grew dim, and my head swam. In order not to fall I leaned against a soldier. The dreadful unhappiness of this little one, the piteous torture of his little body, the misery and bitterness of his tiny being, and especially the quiet

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bearing of his pain, had such an effect upon me that I held my breath, and my heart's quick throbbing echoed a painful question, "Is *this* possible, too?"

The child still held his frozen toes, his head was yet bent, and the tears still flowed. Now and then a long quivering sigh shook his little suffering body. The men around the fire were silent. It seemed as if a gigantic mountain of misery lay upon this fire, and with its unmeasured weight had pressed these poor human creatures as the ants are crushed under a careless foot.

Cheda still stood over the child. I could see that he made great efforts to hold back the tears.

"Oh, my good Cheda, I understand your pain," I thought within myself. "Yes, my good one, before this unhappiness, tears are nothing! My Cheda, my good soldier father, I can imagine what is now in your heart, for seeing the dreadful condition of this child, you remember your own children, your three angels, and, with a deathly fear, you ask yourself: How is it with them now? Your

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heart and your soul fly to them, but your brain, unable to give answer to this question, makes horrible, unbearable imaginings from which one might become insane, or die . . .”

I wished to run there to embrace him, and to take this child in my arms, to kiss him, to warm him on my heart and breast, to give him my life, but I could not move. But, in this unhappy child, this pure, innocent young soul, now so torn and almost killed, and this poor father, with pitilessly anguished heart, I saw the true life of Serbia. Is it life? No, this is crucifixion. The fathers, surrounded on all sides, fought and died, defending, in vain, that which is most holy, liberty. Their children, driven to all parts, endlessly going from bad to worse, hungry, barefooted, sick, waited for death, which came. And so divided, they died without embrace, without kiss, without a last farewell!

But all at once in my heart I felt a warmth melting the thick ice around it; and in my dark soul a torch lighted itself, which dispelled the darkness and bitterness. It made

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me straighten, filled my breast with freshness, and gave me new strength. Is it not so, my good man, who is reading these lines, that you, too, have felt this same warmth and this same light, when you were at the culmination of your unhappiness, when your heart was pitilessly hurt, when your breast was stricken by the rough strokes of the reality of life, when on your shoulders a whole mountain of pain and sorrow was laid, and when your soul was frozen and dark? Is it not so? If this were not so, you would be stifled under the weight of unhappiness, or you would die. This warmth, this light, is *hope*. It is the most beautiful, the most holy gift of God, just because it comes in our darkest days. Hope not only saves our lives, but continues them and prepares them for the whole beauty of life. At this moment, brightened by the light of hope, my heart clearly and distinctly spoke to me: —

“If it is a cross, resurrection must come! If the Son of God, fighting to save humanity, was crucified, his faith was resurrected, in all its beauty and might. If the Serbians are

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fighting for their liberty, it makes no difference that they are now crucified; their liberty must be resurrected again! Humanity was born to be free, and one of its miserable members cannot change this law. Serbia will *not* remain enslaved to Germany, for God and humanity will not permit this!"

Cheered by this thought and full of new strength, I kneeled and kissed this little Christ. The child turned his head toward me, looked at me a long time with his beautiful tender eyes full of tears, and then suddenly he threw his little arms around my neck and kissed me warmly. I do not know what he felt in his childish heart, for those are the secrets of nature which we do not understand, but *I* know that then, if ever, I got a kiss from an angel! Yes, from a little angel, for it seemed to me that these tragic but quiet tears, these silent sufferings of superhuman pains, without anger, without spitefulness, spoke to me: —

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

"Father, forgive them, for they know not

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what they do — and they know not the great punishment awaiting them!” echoed in my heart.

* * *

The soldiers whom Cheda brought had been a long time with the child and had become friends with him. They went to the fires to warm their frozen feet and limbs. My soldiers were still sitting around our fire and looking wonderingly at the child.

He was sitting between my legs, wrapped in a blanket, eating *popara*¹ from a plate on his knees. Finding that we caressed him, took him on our laps, made him warm and gave him nourishment, he became at ease and wiped away his tears. Now and then he held his spoon in the air, looked around him at the wreath of red, bearded faces which all looked at him with tender eyes. Then he would smile. This smile of love and gratitude brightened painfully his tired face, but did not hover long upon it. His eyes sought

¹ *Popara* is made from bread and water cooked with a little grease.

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Cheda the most and looked at him with the greatest tenderness. Cheda was sitting beside me, silent, with his head between his knees. Now and then he straightened up, caressed the child's hair and asked him tenderly: —

“Are you warm now, my little one?”

“Yes, my good cheeka.”¹

When he had finished his popara, I asked him: —

“What is your name?”

“Rada.”

“How beautiful your name is!” I exclaimed, and caressed his cheeks.

“My real name is Radeevoy,” said the child, “but my nana² always called me Rada, and I like that best.”

“Where is your nana?” I asked.

The child looked at me with his beautiful, sad, oh, so sad, eyes, which quickly filled with tears; his pale face quivered from inner, indescribable pain, and he slowly whispered: —

“I don't know.”

¹ All older men the Serbian children address as *cheeka*, which means uncle.

² Serbian children call their mothers *nana*, which corresponds to “mamma.”

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“And your father?”

“He was killed at the first of the war,” said the child sadly.

The red wreath around the fire was gone, all heads had bent before the heart-rending sorrow of this child. There was silence except the crackling of the fire and the shriek of the wind.

Then little Rada, seeing these kind men around him, seeing this tenderness and love, felt a need to open his heart, to share the great grief of his childish soul, to tell all his pain and sorrow, and thus to relieve the bitterness which filled to overflowing his little heart. This child spoke strangely! A tiny victim of the awful fate of his nation, he had fought for his existence even as a man might fight. And so he was old far beyond his years. Though scarcely eight years of age, he understood perfectly many things, and many others that his brain could hardly comprehend he yet truly described, so deeply were they burned upon his mind. So from this innocent mouth came this almost incredible story.

“I have told to cheeka Cheda that I am

OUR CHILD

from Bogosavatz. And you know that this nice village is near Tser, between Shabatz and Loznitza. Hae! It was fine to live there! After the Turkish and Bulgarian war our zadrooga¹ was again in bloom. And my father and my uncle came back alive.

“My father was wounded in the arm and my uncle in two places, but both got well and they could work again. Our house was full of people, and our zadrooga was strong and powerful, for it was never divided. Deda (grandfather) was the head of zadrooga. How good my deda was! You know, my father and uncle were his children. My uncle had two little daughters, and I had two older brothers and one younger sister. Hae! How we did live in our house! To tell the truth, that winter after the Bulgarian war, we had suffered because those two years before we had not worked much in our fields, but my father had cut the wood, and carried it to Shabatz and

¹ *Zadrooga* — the patriarchal family association, consisting of the head of the family (*domatchin*), his wife and unmarried daughters, his sons, and sometimes his nephews, and their children, all living in a group of small houses about the main family house in the village.

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got fine money for it, and so we lived. The next spring we all worked very hard. Bogomoi! how we did work! We sowed all our fields, and the good God promised a fine crop. We were so happy again and so satisfied.

“And now I cannot tell you just exactly why, but soon after Veedov-Dan,¹ my deda became very sorrowful. And not only deda, but my father and uncle too. And still later, when we began to thresh, all the people in our home were so sad. Then I did not know why they were so sad and I was troubled, because, I remembered, before, even though I was very little, that during threshing there was so much shooting and songs and music and dancing. Now there was none of these, but all the people were silent and worked like bees, and in the evening they gathered before our house and they talked very long and they scolded, and my deda read a paper. There must have been something terrible in this paper because my deda became very

¹ One of the greatest national Serbian holidays — the 15th of June. This same day, 1914, the Crown Prince Ferdinand was killed in Serajevo.

OUR CHILD

angry and he would exclaim: 'A Vranso! A Vranso! ¹ God shall pay you for this!'

"Just when we finished our threshing, one night the bells began to ring, the drums to beat, prangea ² to shoot, and the beerov ³ ran along the road crying zeelcezatsia.⁴ So war came again! My father and cheeka had to go right away. Bogo-moi! how we children and baba (grandmother) wept! Deda talked to us, and my father said: 'Don't weep, because the fathers who have little children cannot be killed. You see, I came back from the other war ⁵ alive.'

"Then we were quiet because we believed our father. Cheeka went this same night, and my father the next day to Shabatz. Then our house became quiet as the dead and the village, too. Our school was closed, and deda would n't let me go after our flock of sheep! My nana took me very often on her lap and I could hear her say: 'A Vranso, God shall kill you!' and I thought that God would cer-

¹ Name which Serbian peasants use for the Austrian Emperor, Franz Josef I.

² Small gun.

³ Village policeman.

⁴ He could not pronounce "mobilization." ⁵ 1912-13.

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tainly kill him with lightning and then the war could stop right away."

"And do you know who was Vransky?" interrupted Trilo suddenly, angry and impatient with the child. Trilo was a strange soldier. He was from the most wild, mountainous, and hidden part of Serbia. He grew as wild as the nature around him. When he was taken into military service, he liked it very much and remained in it. For nine years of military service he got the rank of sergeant. He grew up in the Homoly Mountains and had no education. He was naturally clever and had acquired considerable knowledge since being in the army. He was an excellent soldier, a fearless warrior, somewhat wild and rough in spite of his nine years of discipline, and was always angry if a private knew more than he. The serious talk of the child seemed strange to him, and he jealously compared it with his own knowledge, and so made this rough exclamation.

Little Rada looked at him wonderingly, shrugged his shoulders, smiled, and said: "God with you! How could I not know who

OUR CHILD

Vranyo is! He was the king of the Shwaba ¹ who stole our Bosnia and Herzegovina, and who hates all Serbians, and because he hates us he is making war with us!"

The soldiers began to murmur: "A very wise child!" "A clever little head!" "A strange child!" "How can he know all this?" Cheda became angry. He had listened to the child's story, and having children of his own he knew that little Rada was not so different from others, but terribly unhappy. So he began to chide the soldiers around him:—

"What are you jabbering? Crazy! What is there strange here? Instead of this little one learning from his counting-frame under the tender chiding of his mother, instead of chasing butterflies and making toy whistles and popguns, a dreadful fate has compelled him to bind one day to another by pitiless hunger and hardship. And he has learned all. That is the difference! Is there anything strange? Now, shut up! — Go on, my little heart," he said tenderly to Rada and caressed his hair.

¹ All Teutonic people are called "Shwaba" by Serbians. It is a name of derision.

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Rada wrapped himself closer in his blanket, took a small piece of wood, and began to poke the fire with it. Then he said very slowly and sadly: —

“I thought my father never told lies, but, *bogo-moi!* he told them. He said that fathers who have little children are not killed, but it was only two weeks after he went away that we heard that he was killed. Then it was terrible in our house. My nana screamed so, and tore her hair so, that I thought she would die, too; and because of that we children cried more. Baba got sick, and deda when he had put the black flag on our door wept, too; we had never seen him weep before. My nana did not want to eat anything, but she wanted to go away and find my dead father and bring him back to our village and bury him there. Only deda held her back.

“I heard in our village, and from my deda and from my *streena*¹ too, that our place was very near to the frontier and that the Shwaba could come there very easily. The other children had heard the same, so together we

¹ Aunt.

OUR CHILD

all went to Laleecha Hill which was toward Loznitza, where we dug trenches, made flags, and swords, and slings, and carried pebbles from the brooks that we might be able to wait for the Shwaba and defend our village.

“Bata Meele, my oldest brother, was our captain. You know he was the strongest boy in our village, and he said we should not fear the Shwaba even if many of them came. The whole village was so frightened. Nothing was talked of but how the Shwaba would come and kill all of us, and burn up everything. Then I was frightened, too, and I did not go to Laleecha Hill any more, but stayed beside my nana and my deda. Many were getting ready to fly, and once my streena said this to deda. Oh, bogo-moi, I never saw my deda so angry: ‘What! To leave my home, my fields, my cattle, the black flag? Never! And then the Shwabas are not Turks, they do nothing bad to the women and children!’ said my deda, and I became quiet because I believed him. Bogo-moi, you see, I know now that he told lies, too.

“Since the beginning of war we had always heard cannon, but they were very far off. By

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and by we heard them nearer and nearer. And just at Sw. Panteleea [little holiday, August 30] the cannon boomed at Tser. All the people were frightened. From all the villages around us the people ran through our village toward Valievo. And there were so many people! All women and children! Then many wagons of komora began to pass through our village toward Valievo. And the soldiers were everywhere. *Bogo-moi!* There were so many! They went everywhere and toward Tser.

“After two days the cannon were heard at Laleecha Hill and even the guns, and this was very near. Then no more people nor komora, but soldiers and wounded went through our village. You know, a hundred wagons full of wounded had passed along our road, and how many walked I could not tell you. The whole day I did nothing but stand on our fence with a jar of water, giving it to them. And nana stood at the door and gave *pogacha*,¹ honey and sugar, always saying: ‘For the sake of the soul of my soldier.’

¹ A sort of hard bread.

OUR CHILD

“The third day, early in the morning, our soldiers began to dig trenches at our Laleecha, you know, just there, where we dug them before. Then the cannon boomed very near. At noon our soldiers began to shoot from Laleecha, but the Austrian shells fell in our village. Oh! Bogo-moi! How terrible it was then! Then our deda was frightened and ordered us to go down to the cellar. Afterwards there came many women with their children from our neighborhood to our cellar, because our house was made of stone and was very strong. Bogo-moi! How all the women cried and the children screamed! My nana took me and my little sister in her arms, and bata Bora, you know he was my brother next older than me, was sitting on the ground with his head hidden in nana’s lap. Nana did not cry, but kissed us and told us to be silent. And my bata Meele stood at the door of the cellar and cried to us often: ‘Don’t be scared, Laleecha is still holding!’

“Then the night came, and you know how terrible it is in the cellar at night! I thought that no one could see to work in the night;

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because of that I thought they would stop shooting. But I was mistaken. They began to shoot more, so that our whole house shook like a little straw. Then I thought that 'they' must be real devils because they could see in the darkness.

"Suddenly bata Meele, who always went to the door, cried: 'Fire! Fire! The whole village is in flames!' Oh! Bogο-moi! How we all began to moan and scream! My nana kneeled and told us to kneel and clasp our hands. Then I and bata Bora kneeled, and even our little sister, and we clasped our hands, and nana took them in hers and we said our prayers to God. Stanikich's house, you know, the house of our neighbor, was all in flames, and the light came through the windows, and the cellar was as light as day. Then I saw that all the women and children were kneeling and saying their prayers to God.

"Suddenly my deda came in carrying the black flag, and said to my nana: 'Take off Rada's shirt and tie it beside this black flag. His shirt is white and, besides, that is luck,

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too!’¹ Then my nana began to cry, too. And I felt that she was shivering all over when she took off my shirt. Then she tied the sleeves of my shirt beside the black flag, and deda carried it out. Then my nana kissed me hard so many times. When deda came in again he said to us that we must not cry any longer. Oh, how beautifully my deda spoke! I could not exactly tell you all he said, but he talked so beautifully that all the women stopped crying, and only the children still cried. Then my nana took me and my little sister in her arms again and bata Bora hid his face in her lap. Little sister went to sleep, but Bora and I could not sleep. The cannon boomed still louder and the house shook more and more. And so the night passed.

“Before morning the cannon stopped, but the guns began shooting terribly right in our village. A little while after a horrible yell came. Then the women began to cry again and the children moaned and wailed. I was so frightened that I could n’t cry. But it was

¹ The white garment of innocent children is thought to save from evil those who carry it.

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not for a long time. The guns grew less and less and the yells farther and farther, and after a while we heard nothing. Yet no one moved in the cellar and we were all still.

"I think, about noon, we heard voices right in our yard. Deda exclaimed: 'Pst! Not a sound!' And my nana put her hand over little sister's mouth because she was crying. Suddenly the door of the cellar opened and I saw plainly four of the Shwaba's soldiers. I thought that the Shwabas could not speak our language, because I heard from my teacher that they speak their own language, but now, one of them cried in exactly our Serbian language:¹ 'Hey, is somebody down there?' We were all silent. Then the Shwabas began to laugh and to shoot at us.² Oh! Bogo-moi! How dreadful it was! The women and children fell to the ground. There was terrible

¹ In Croatia exists the so-called "*Franks*" political party. The Austrian Government in its "device," "*Divide et impera*," had succeeded so far in severing these people that they had become enemies of Serbia. Croatians speak the Serbian language.

² How the Austrians waged the war in Serbia one might see from the books of R. A. Reiss, Professor of Lausanne, Dr. A. van Tienhoven, of Amsterdam, and from the official editions of the Serbian Government. (Author.)

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screaming and moaning! Oh! Bogo-moi! My grandmother fell and deda right away beside her. I thought he was killed too. Oh, I can't tell you all, for I don't know all. Only I distinctly saw when bata Bora's head was smashed in nana's lap. After that I don't know anything that happened. My nana had screamed so and pressed me and my little sister so, so hard in her arms that I thought she would choke us. Afterwards, deda told me that he thought they would never stop shooting and that we would all be killed, but that one among the Shwabas said: 'Don't shoot any more, you make a hole in the casks of brandy!'"

As the little martyr revealed his unhappy heart in this icy night, the soldiers drew more and more close, making a crowd. At the last words of little Rada many of them got up and kneeled, paying no attention to the heat and stifling smoke; they bent toward the child, putting both hands near their ears, and listened to the little one with open mouth and staring eyes. Oh, those eyes! That one had seen them at this moment! Perhaps one

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could then understand what the culmination of horrors created by pain and weakness means. Cheda still sat quietly beside me. Only he bent his head still lower between his legs, letting his hands fall to the ground, clenching the frozen earth with his nails.

Little Rada, who perhaps in his angelic innocence and his ideal childish heart, did not fully realize the dreadfulness of his story, seeing this look on the soldiers' faces, became frightened and asked in a scared way: —

“Do you want that I should tell you still more?”

An old soldier, nearest to Rada, all black, with great tears running down his dirty cheeks (auh! it is only from smoke!), said to him: —

“Tell us, tell us, little one! We are listening to you. Afterwards it will be much easier for you. I know it!”

Rada, in a scared way, lifted his head, and looked at me questioningly with his beautiful eyes. I shivered. In this one look I understood what we were to each other and felt how much I was beginning to love him. I

OUR CHILD

wanted to kiss him, but I was ashamed, and only pressed him more closely in my arms and whispered: —

“Go on, my little heart!”

“Right away after,” proceeded Rada more seriously and sadly, “they took us out from the cellar. Then I saw that our yard was full of soldiers who took us to the soodnitsa.¹ Oh! Bogo-moi! How many people were there! And how frightened they were! The little children did nothing but scream, and the older ones did not cry, but they shivered, and even my deda too. The Shwabas had surrounded us from all sides. How they swore and laughed. Some of them we could understand, but the others we could not at all. We could see that they were very angry. But the most important among them was a captain. Oh! Bogo-moi! He was raging. Even the Shwaba soldiers shivered before him. He did not know Serbian at all, but he had beside him another officer who spoke Serbian as well as my teacher. And this one raged and swore terribly.

¹ Town hall.

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“Suddenly the captain began to laugh like a crazy man and talk to the other who knew Serbian. And this one began to laugh still more. Then he came closer to the people and said: ‘All the children on one side, and the older ones in one line!’ Oh! Bogo-moi! And nana held my little sister in her arms, but when she heard these words she screamed and staggered. Only deda held her and kept her from falling. She grasped us in her arms and cried: ‘I *will not* give up my children!’ But a Shwaba soldier came to her, swore at her awfully, and tore us from nana’s arms, and carried us to the steps of the soodnitsa where all the other children were. Auh! How many screams there were! Many children wanted to run back to their nanas but the Shwabas who were standing near the steps pushed them with their guns, or feet, or legs, and they fell back again. I was holding my little sister. I kissed her and begged her not to cry, but she cried more and more until I thought she would strangle.

“Then the Shwaba soldiers began to beat the people and put them in one line. My nana

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was standing beside deda. My good nana! Oh, my poor nana! She was as pale as death, she swayed like a tree in a gale, and on her skirt she had a big splash of blood from bata Bora's head. Oh, my poor bata Bora! But my deda always said that it was much better that he was killed in the very beginning. I did not see bata Meele nor my aunt. We never knew what happened to her. My nana never took her eyes from us.

"Then the captain stopped laughing and came to one end of the line, and began to pinch the cheek of every one in the line. Oh, how terribly this nasty man pinched! Poor men! Every single one who screamed was carried off right away somewhere by two Shwabas who ran to him. Afterwards, deda told that they were killed right off. When the captain came to my deda, my breathing stopped! But my deda did n't scream! Because, you know, my deda was a very strong man. And when he came to my nana, I wanted to run to defend her, but I could n't because my feet were heavy (with terror). And when that wolf lifted his hand to pinch

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my nana, I hid my head on my sister's breast and waited to hear my nana scream. Oh, thanks to thee, God! My nana did not scream. When I lifted my head and opened my eyes, I saw the captain laughing and pointing to the blood on nana's lap. Then my nana suddenly turned red, and shivered all over and shook her hands, crying very angrily: 'This is the blood of my child whom you have killed. Inhuman man!' My heart stopped beating. What will happen now? When the other officer told the captain what my nana said, both began to laugh again, and went farther to pinch the people. I grew easier.

"When they were through with pinching, many people were taken away, but many stayed. Then the officer ordered that all the people come closer to the steps where the children were, and he went up on the porch and began to talk. I could n't tell you all he said, but he swore terribly. Finally he exclaimed: —

"'Listen now, beasts! The whole of Serbia is under the Austrian Emperor now. There

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is no longer a Serbian king. He is a slave as you are. Because of this you have to love only one Emperor and this is Franz Josiv.¹ Now, when I say, "Long life to Franz Josiv the First," you must all say, "Long life!" Boga-vam! Every one who will not say it will be hung right away. You understand me, swine!

"Oh! Bogo-moi! I nearly died from fear. What will happen now to my little sister? She did n't know anything! Oh, you know, she was so little, and she cried and cried . . . I wanted to bend down to her and tell her to say, 'Long life,' but I did n't dare to move. And nana and deda from above looked at us so with their eyes. The Shwabas came so close to us and looked sharply into everybody's face. The captain was standing near the steps turning in all directions. I must tell you that they did not notice the children so much, excepting one soldier, who was all red and terrible and who just stared up at us. Oh! Bogo-moi! Perhaps he was the most

¹ Little Rada could not pronounce the name of His Apostolic Majesty, Franz Josef the First.

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drunk of all the Shwabas. And my little sister still cried and cried . . .

“Suddenly the officer yelled from the porch: ‘Long life to Franz Josiv the First!’ Immediately I cried ‘Long life’ as loudly as I could, so as to overcome the crying of my little sister. But I did n’t even finish before the red soldier grasped my little sister, like a sack, and took her down to the captain’s feet. And many other Shwabas had pulled many men and women from the crowd by their beards or necks. There was a terrible noise! I ran down to my little sister, and my nana was there. *Yaoy!* How she clasped her! The officer ran down from the porch. *Bogo-moi!* how he swore! How he struck the people! He would n’t listen to the older people, but sent them somewhere, tying some of them first with ropes and cords. When they were done with them, then the officer went to my little sister. *Bogo-moi!* How ugly he looked! A real devil! But he only exclaimed: ‘Aeh, little swine! You will have to learn in your littleness that you must love the Emperor. But we will try to teach you how now!’ Then

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my nana fell on her knees and began to beg them. Poor nana! How she wept, how she begged: 'Oh, sir, so help me God, she does n't know anything! You see how little she is! She loves your Emperor! We all love him! Don't do anything to her, please, I beg you, *don't!* Truly she is so, so little! Here, kill me!'

"I kneeled and begged them too. Even I wanted to kiss the hand of the captain. Then they began to talk something in their language, among themselves, for a long time. Finally, the officer asked my nana what her name was and wrote it on a piece of paper and put it in his pocket, and said to the red, drunken soldier: 'To Shabatz!' Then the soldier lifted my nana, and another one grasped me, and took us to the church close. And so we were separated from our deda.

"In the church close were many people standing in rows of four, and around them were lots of Shwabas with guns. When we came there they put us, too, into rows. My nana held me and my sister in her arms and kissed us often. Quickly we started from

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there. Oh! Bogo-moi! I could n't tell you all; it was a dreadful journey. All that night and all the next forenoon we walked and walked. How the Shwabas beat the poor men and women who could n't walk any farther! My nana carried my little sister all the way, and many times she wanted to carry me, but I did not let her. My poor nana! I knew how she suffered! I could hardly walk. Many times I just *could n't* go any farther, and I felt as if I must fall. But then I thought, if I fall, my nana will stop, and if she stops, they will strike her right away. And so I kept going.

“The next day at noon we came to Shabatz. Bogo-moi! If you could only see Shabatz! All the houses were destroyed and burned down. And everywhere so many Shwabas with flowers in their caps! How they sang! How they shouted! And the big ‘tombiles’¹ were whirring in all the streets! They locked us up in a magaza² near the church; it had no roof because it had been broken in. We were very cold and wet by the rain many

¹ Automobiles. ;

² A large warehouse.

OUR CHILD

times. Bogo-moi, how many people were there! But only women, girls, and children. We were just piled on top of each other. But after a few days there were less and less, because the Shwabas, in the nights, took out a great many of the girls, and even the women, our mothers. How terribly their children cried. But it was easier for us who were left. Then we could lie down on the ground. The Shwabas did not give us anything but bread and water.

“The very first day my little sister got sick. She would n’t eat the bread at all, but she asked for so much water. My nana cried and held my sister all day long, she moaned so sadly. Oh! Bogo-moi! Every time a Shwaba came in, my nana begged him pitifully to bring a doctor, but not one would listen to her. And so these awful days went by. I was sick, too, but I did n’t dare to tell my poor nana.

“One night, when none of us slept because there were so many sick children, and women, too, who moaned terribly, we heard cannon very far off. Oh, if you could have seen these

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poor people then! Everybody got up and began to whisper: 'They are coming!' 'Here are Serbians coming!' 'They will save us!' Bogo-moi! How glad and happy I was! My nana kneeled over my little sick sister, folded her hands, and said: 'O God, God help them! Help them that they can help us!'

"But next day, early in the morning, when we heard the cannon nearer, a soldier came in and read nana's name. I got so stiff! What will happen now? The soldier ordered my nana to take my little sister and follow him, and he took me under his arm like a goone. We went through the town a long ways until we came to a big house which had not been spoiled very much. When we went into a room, I saw the officer who had spoken Serbian in our village. I was so frightened, when I saw him, that both my legs were numb. In the room were three other officers. They looked at us very angrily for a while. Afterwards the officer came close to nana and said: 'You see, we saved the life of your daughter, even though we had the full right to kill her. Now, you have to do something for us.' He

OUR CHILD

turned to the other officers and they talked in the Shwaba's language very seriously. My nana was standing, as white as the wall, and my heart was beating awfully. Then the officer turned to nana again and said, very sternly: 'Kiss your children, for this will be the last time, if you are foolish and do not listen to us.'

"My nana only screamed and fell on her knees and began to cry: 'Oh, sir, *don't*, I beg of you, *don't* do anything to my children! Do anything you want with me, but not with them. Oh, please, I beg you as of God! I have already lost two of my children and these two are all that are left to me!' The officer got very angry. 'Crazy animal! We will not do anything to your brats! All we want of you is to go to a place, which we will tell you, and come back.'

"When my nana heard this she began to cry more and to plead: 'Oh, sir, good sir, I *cannot* leave my children alone! Look here! Look here, how sick my little one is! So help me God, she is terribly sick! Oh, my God, she is dying! And she will certainly die without

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me!’ The officer got so angry that he stamped on the ground. The other officers got up and came closer. And they swore terribly. The officer then came very close with his face to my nana’s face, and began to shake his fists, and scream: ‘Ah, because of that we will be sure that you will come back. We do not ask anything very terrible from you! You know the whole district? Now, you will go to a place which we will tell to you, you will see there something which we will tell to you, and you will come back right off and tell us what you saw. This place is not very far from here. To go there, to see what we want, and to come back will take three days. You will see your children again after three days! But if you do not come back in the morning of the third day, at noon both of your children will be killed! Hae! killed, killed!’

“My nana fell with her face on the ground. Oh, I can’t tell you how awful it was! My nana got up very quickly and began to clasp and kiss the knees of the officers and she begged terribly. I kissed both hands of that wolf officer. And my little sister was lying on

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the ground, writhing with pain and crying dreadfully! Oh! Bogo-moi! Even an icy stone would have grown soft at my nana's crying, but these men were real devils and they would not hear anything. Not anything!

"Then two soldiers came in — two terrible soldiers — and took us from our nana — my poor nana — my good nana — how she scratched, terribly scratched everybody — and struck, struck their ugly faces! And I scratched and bit, too, and cried. But they tore us from our nana — and they threw us out — oh! Bogo-moi! I never — I never saw my nana again — never again my good nana — my poor —"

Slowly and more slowly the unhappy child spoke and his last words died away in the icy night. In my arms he grew silent, with his head laid against my breast. There was a heavy stillness. Only the freezing wind rose higher and higher and the fire was going out. On my hands I felt the hot tears fall, the silent quiet tears of little Rada . . .

"Oh, kookoo-mene!"¹

¹ Exclamation of sorrow.

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Afterwards Rada went on again sadly. Oh, I can never tell you how sad this little voice was.

“Oh, kookoo-mene! After two days, the Serbians came to Shabatz, but too late. My little sister died. Oh! Bogo-moi! How all those women in the magaza cared for my sick sister after our nana was gone. One of them had even torn her chemise in pieces and put them in cold water to lay on sister’s head. I said prayers all day to save my little sister, but God did not listen to me . . .

“Afterwards the Serbian soldiers took me back to my village where I found deda and bata Meele. How we kissed each other and how we wept! Now deda cried like a little child . . . Then how terribly sad were the passing days! The whole day we would sit in our big house without talking. Afterwards we fled again away down to Arangelovats. When the Shwabas were driven out again, we came back to our home. Winter came. Awful winter! We did n’t have anything in the house and we had to live on bread which we got from our Government. Then bata Meele got sick

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from teevooz.¹ Just at Christmas Eve we thought he would die. But, Frantsoozee² put something [serum] in his back and he got well. When the springtime came, deda and bata Meele began to work right away, because everybody said our country needed much wheat and every one must work. How they worked and worked! The soldiers helped, too. I took care of the poor sheep which the Shwabas had not taken or killed. Hae! How few of them were left! But I loved to take care of them because I was in the mountains all day,³ and I liked to be alone.

“That year just when we wanted to thresh the wheat, the Shwabas came again just as before, and fought us with all their power. We

¹ *Typhus exactematicus*, which had, at the end of 1914 and the first of 1915, destroyed one third of all the Serbian population. The cradle of this horrible disease was Valevo after the second retreat of the Austrians, where they left more than six thousand men sick with this dreadful fever. (Author.)

² Little Rada meant the French doctors who came immediately to Serbia and bravely fought this dread disease. Thanks to the French doctors the disease did not completely destroy the population. Serbia had about five hundred doctors. And after this fever had raged one month, one hundred and fifty of them were dead.

³ Serbian children are brought up to be alone with the flocks.

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had to fly again. We had ox-wagons and we went in them. Oh, how many, many people had to go! When we came to Valevo, there were so many people that I thought the whole of Serbia was flying, and it was very hard to move along the road. Oh, Bogomoi! One dark rainy night when we were in the great mountains, our wagon tipped over. I was not hurt, but bata Meele sprained his leg and poor deda's head was awfully bruised. Oh, my poor deda! He died after two days.

“Then I and bata Meele went on alone. We could n't ride because our oxen were killed, too. How we suffered! Everywhere were so many, many people! Everything cost so much and we did n't have money. Oh! Bogomoi! How long we walked! When we came to Krushevatz I lost my bata Meele. I never saw him again. One day he heard that the Government would bring some wagons with soldier's bread and that it would be given to the people. He ran right off to the station and told me to wait on a bench for him. I waited and waited, but he never came again. Then I looked for him everywhere for a long time,

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but I never found him. Only I heard that the people around the wagons were so thick that many were killed.

“Then I had to go entirely alone. Oh! Bogomoi! When my bata Meele was with me he knew how to get bread, but when I was alone I did n’t know how. Oh, such dreadful days! Many times I thought I would die, but the soldiers passing would give me something to eat; so I went on. But on the last road I did not see any more soldiers, only hungry people like me. In the last few days I could not walk any more — my shoes were all worn out — my feet froze — I was so hungry — I thought — I will surely . . .”

A long painful sigh broke from little Rada’s lips, and I felt two powerful hands lift him from my arms. The fire had gone out. It was pitchy dark and the wind shrieked louder and louder. But yet through its shriek I heard beside me the moaning of little Rada and his sweet little voice: —

“My good, my good cheeka Cheda!”

* * *

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“What will we do with him?” I asked Cheda later when the soldiers had rebuilt the fires and the child was sleeping between him and me. At my question Cheda started, lifted his head, and looked at me.

“How, what will we do? Keep him!”

“Ah, Cheda, I did not doubt this for a moment. Only how, how?”

“What! More than seventy men cannot keep a child!” exclaimed Cheda in great astonishment.

“Oh, Cheda, seventy men! To-day we are; to-morrow we are not! Why do you count us? And then, there are marching, flying, retreating, hunger, cold, snow, and a hundred other pains! How can a child, a little one, endure all these?”

For a moment Cheda was still. His face darkened with great sorrow. Then he made a resolute gesture like a man who makes a decision in his mind, and he said: —

“Can you not see that he has suffered much more than we? Poor little one, he is used to enduring the greatest hardships! I beg of you, Meecha, listen to me. When I found this

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child moaning and dying on the ground, oh, my God! you can't imagine how dreadful it was to me! Because I am a father I have willingly become a man with blood-stained hands, a murderer, in the defense of these little ones. But why talk? You know that my Boshko is Rada's age . . . and that is all. Thanks to God, we still have our komora and four horses along with it. Three of them have to haul, but Beeja, the little horse, has not had to work since Lescovatz. Rada can ride on Beeja. Julock has charge of the komora, you know. He will keep Rada as carefully as his own eyes, for he is a father and loves children. The komora is never in danger, at least from the Bulgarians. When Julock brings the rations at night, he might bring little Rada along so we can see him. Julock comes soon now. Do you not think we should give Rada to him?"

"Yes, yes, Cheda, but . . ."

I, too, had thought of giving Rada in charge of the equipment trains, for these were usually together and went ahead of the companies, sometimes as far as five or ten miles.

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The commander of each company's komora returned at night with one horse, bringing the company's rations which he distributed. Certainly Rada would be safe with the komora.

But, I anxiously thought, what can he eat? Where will he sleep? And, looking down on the little figure under the thin blanket, I cried out: —

“Can you not see that he is naked and barefooted?”

Cheda started as if struck, and sighed: —

“Yes, how can we send him?”

Suddenly the soldiers, who were still sitting around my fire, began to move and whisper among themselves. And from among them a loud, decisive voice spoke: —

“Eh, that's very easy!”

I started, and Cheda jumped, knelt and peered into the crowd.

“Who is that?” he asked excitedly.

A small soldier whose clothes were ragged and burned, with his cap falling over his ears down to his shoulders, crept up to him and said: —

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“That’s me, Sergeant. You know I am a tailor, and I could make a suit for him, and I . . .”

“Shut up, crazy! From what?” Cheda was out of patience.

After these words the soldiers began to move and whisper among themselves. One after another they slowly got up, hiding behind each other, and went out somewhere in the darkness of the cold, windy night. Presently they came quietly back again, somewhat abashed. One came closer to the fire, carrying in his hand a coat, and said in an embarrassed manner: —

“Why . . . you know, Lieutenant, that I have two coats. And this one I cannot carry any longer; it is too heavy . . . you could make something for the little one from it.” And he threw the coat down beside the fire.

Another came, carrying a pair of trousers, saying very quickly: —

“Here, you can see that I have two pairs of these. Boga-me! Two pairs of trousers! It is so warm. I just want to throw one pair away! You can see for yourself —” And he opened

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his overcoat. I recognized the thin, green, summer trousers which Serbian soldiers got last year from Russia.

Afterward a young soldier came to the fire. He was the youngest and most handsome man in my company, whom we always petted. He tried to hide something in his hands, and said simply, though quite embarrassed: —

“I have a pair of stockings, a pair of embroidered stockings. I have kept them carefully. I got them from my girl, from my sweetheart, when I left the village. But . . . listen, shnaitsa, cut off the toes, and sew them up again, and then they will fit little Rada . . .”

Our *glavonya* ¹ just flew to the fire, and dashed his cap on the ground, scolding excitedly: —

“Well, I will not suffer from you any longer. You are too small! And since my hair grew so bushy you won’t go on. I always had to tie you with a string, which just killed me under my chin. Eh, you won’t much longer!”

¹ A man with a very large head.

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And so on. Everybody gave something, and all did it with a willing heart. The pile of gifts grew wonderfully. Not only was there enough for Rada, but for ten other children. The little tailor knelt before the pile, the most happy of all. And when a soldier threw something on the pile he would say, "Thank you, thank you, brother! It is very good."

In the beginning Cheda looked at all this, but soon hid his head between his knees. And I, I could n't hide my emotion and tears.

The little tailor was all changed by his happy smile. He looked at everything with his experienced eyes and exclaimed: —

"Can you not see, Sergeant, how easy it is!"

But suddenly he grew serious, his happy face darkened and he exclaimed in a dismayed tone: —

"Mene nesrechog! I have only needle and thread, but no shears, and here one will have to cut very much!"

Shears! What consternation! What terror! What is to be done now? Was little Rada to remain naked in spite of all of these

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gifts, this perfect generosity? Really, I was very anxious, and Cheda lifted his head and looked around with a questioning glance. The soldiers, although they knew that they had no scissors, unconsciously felt in their pockets. Suddenly the tailor made an exclamation and ran to me: —

“I beg you, Lieutenant, let me go. I remember now. I have a friend in the staff of the regiment who has shears, I know. Let me go. Boga-me! I will come back before Julock gets here.”

We all grew excited, and I said to the tailor: —

“Go, go! Only don’t lose yourself, and certainly try to find the shears.”

The little tailor pulled his large cap down still more, and ran away in the freezing wind. And through the howl of the wind we heard again his happy voice: —

“Be sure I *will* find the shears!”

Silence fell around the fire. The big wood burned cheerfully. We no longer felt the terrible cold. How changed were all these men! All those black faces were now light, and a

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smile on each one. At this moment they had forgotten the terrible present, and in looking over the fire and their gifts with tender, shining eyes at the little child, they had seen their past, their happy past. Little Rada still slept. He was content for the first time in a long while, because he fell asleep knowing that he was surrounded by the hearts of forty fathers and as many brothers, all full of love.

“Hae-e-e! Second company!” sounded a voice in the darkness.

“Here, here!” replied my soldiers.

After a little while a soldier appeared, muffled in a hood which looked like a horn above his face. His horse followed him, its panting breath falling to the ground like red steam.

“Lieutenant, here is an order from the Colonel. Ooh! dog’s weather!” I took the order and he squatted before the fire and spread his big hands before it.

The order was short. “Gathering of battalion at five o’clock. Movement of regiment immediately after. Direction, village of Boshniak. Once more is asked of you that, etc., etc.”

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Cheda pulled my sleeve and said to me slowly: —

“I did not tell you. To-morrow we shall have an assault. Many armies are gathered here now. The whole division of Shoomadia, the defense of Belgrade, the corps of Valandov, and many other regiments. To-morrow, that is to say, to-day, we shall attack the right wing of the Bulgarians so that the left wing will have to retreat from Lebana. It is the only way to save the place, the pass, and so all the people. Hae! If only the division of Shoomadia had come ten hours earlier, perhaps we could still have held Dobra-Glava — and certainly Lebana. But when they saw that they could not come with their infantry, they sent their artillery in a terrible rush yesterday . . .”

“Those cannon which saved us yesterday?” I interrupted.

“Yes. Oh, you don’t know anything? You did not know that the King himself was shooting those cannon?”

“The King!” cried the soldiers.

“Yes. When he heard of our peril, he

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hastened from Prokuple, waited for the cannon and took them himself to the positions. He, himself, shot one of them. You have seen for yourself how dreadful it was there! All the cannon of the Bulgarians were directed to these eight of ours. The men were killed in piles around them."

"And the King was still there?" exclaimed a soldier.

"Yes."

"Poor cheecha! What! He wished to be killed?" asked another voice.

"No wonder!" replied Cheda slowly.

* * *

Thus we got our child.

The Fifteenth Regiment had the Fourth Battalion, the Fourth Battalion had the Second Company, the Second Company had the komora, the komora had Julock; he had four horses, and among them was Beeja. He was not an ordinary horse! He was small, thick, with slender legs and a beautiful head! Black with a white star in his forehead, he had been the property of Julock and had lived in his

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house with his children as a member of the family. When the war came the Government took Beeja, by requisition, to its service. By a strange chance he was sent to the Fifteenth Regiment, and my colonel, liking Julock, gave Beeja to him. Beeja was very sad from the first, because he loved Julock's children and the separation was hard for him. But finding that he was near his master and that he helped him, he made peace with his destiny. He carried his heavy burden quietly and patiently. We all liked him. Often I petted him and gave him sugar when I had it. After Lescovatz, where my company had lost many things, I gave orders not to load him any more, thinking that this would be much easier for him. But I was mistaken. He was very sensitive and easily hurt. When he saw that he went free, he thought that he was useless, that no one loved him any more, and became very downcast. He ate nothing; his round stomach grew flat; the big bones showed on his sides; he permitted his tail and mane to be filled with burdock burrs, and went along with his nose to the ground.

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It was wonderful to see him, when little Rada got on his back the first time. Beeja had a good memory and he foolishly loved his happy past, even as we did. Feeling Rada on his back, he thought that he was one of his little friends. Oh, how proud he was! How high he held his beautiful head, and what graceful little steps he made! And later, when he saw how much Julock and all the rest of us loved Rada, he was quite sure that Rada was one of his good little friends, and from this time he, too, loved Rada. When he saw that he was useful, he began to eat again. Not only did he eat what was given him, but he pulled down the small branches, and even ate the thistles. Rada and he became the best of friends. They never parted. They slept together, for Beeja was so warm! Rada loved Beeja as well as his own eyes! He petted him, pulled his ears, kissed his nose, talked to him unceasingly, patted his neck, and patiently picked out the burrs from his mane and tail. And so both of them were happy.

We had no opportunity to see Rada for three days; we were fighting almost continu-

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ously. After fierce and terrible fighting for two days, the right wing of the Bulgarians was smashed entirely. We saw, the afternoon of the second day, their left wing in disordered flight through the valley of Yablanitzza from Lebana. The third day my division had to hold new positions, while all the other divisions were retreating over the pass of Lebana. And that night we passed over too.

How impatiently we waited for Julock to bring little Rada! And finally, when Julock appeared in the darkness, limping and leading Beeja, and we heard the happy sound of Rada's "Good-evening," when he jumped and ran toward us, and embraced us, we trembled. Then we knew how much we loved this child. And these rough hearts, which were stout in the most dreadful scenes, now weakened; and the eyes of these men who never wept now filled with tears.

We could now see how beautiful a child little Rada was! The new suit fitted him like a glove. A real little soldier! To tell the truth, the cap of that *glavonya* was too large for him, but it was better so because of the cold and

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wind. Julock had found a way to bathe him and had even cut his hair. Instead of dirt and tears, fair white skin and rosy cheeks showed. From his little red lips a stream of honey-sweet words flowed without stopping, and his lovely eyes glittered like two little stars! Yes, our dear stars! The little stars of our great happiness!

Little Rada went from one to another; everybody petted, kissed, and embraced him, and he spoke to everybody with his cheerful little voice. He was quite changed. He was no longer a serious, unhappy human being, aged before his time, no longer a miserable little man, bent under a terrible burden of a thousand pains, but again a happy little child. Seeing around him these good fathers and many tender brothers, who had stayed his bitter tears and lifted the heavy burdens from his little shoulders, he again became a joyful little bird, always singing and always giving the great love of his little heart to all of us.

And we older ones, how changed we were! About this I will not speak. Everybody who is a father, or who has a little brother, will

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know what this child had done for us. And each of us was either a father or a brother, each was a Serbian, and this was a Serbian child!

Thus passed these happy days.

My regiment was again the rear one. We had again constantly to defend the retreat. We were fighting from day to day. During the day we fought; one part of the night we retreated; the other part we rested, if such a time can be called rest. Before the dawn we went to the new positions, and the next day fought again. The fighting was dreadful, — very, very bloody; but now we did not feel this so bitterly, for we knew that after the battle little Rada would be waiting for us. His smile, his words, his love, his little starry eyes would cheer and comfort us. We fought with an almost superhuman power, defending our child. He was a symbol for us. The future of Serbia, happiness, which we had to defend, and for which it was so sweet to die!

I will never forget those nights when we were with Rada. How this diamond shone in

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the darkness! And under his radiance how we changed! The bloody hands were washed, the black faces would brighten under the touch of his little hand, and the eyes lighten under the gleam of his little stars. Very often, when we had corn, we made popcorn to the great joy of little Rada, or we would make tea which he loved very much, and drinking the tea, or with a mouth full of popcorn, he would tell us about his Beeja, about the great success in making whistles along the way, about the very, very good beans which Julock cooked, about the road, about the brooks, about the snow and how many of his pictures he made by lying in it, about the villages, about the friends, and a hundred other things.

Then we were so happy! In these moments we forgot our dreadful present pain, unhappiness, weariness, cold, snow, blood, and murders; and looking on this Serbian child we thought of our future, about the new, bright, magnificent future of Serbia! And in those nights the words of Evariste Gamlin often came to my mind: "It is nothing that

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blood is now flowing; it is nothing that we are now dying, for you, my little one, you will live in a happy future, in a golden liberty!"¹

* * *

But there were terrible moments which were still more terrible because of little Rada.

One day we were surrounded — surrounded on all sides. That day we were at the position of Sweertzee, just at the old Serbian-Turkish border. The positions were very unfortunate for us. There was a plateau which was hollow in the middle, like a saddle upside down. At one end of the plateau was the old Serbian *karaoola*,² and on the other end was the Turkish tower. At the left side of the plateau there were two ranges of high, sharp hills. One of them extended for two miles from the Serbian tower, and the other for three miles from the Turkish tower. Between these ranges was a very deep, dark valley. And all the hills were covered with old forests and big trees; and everywhere the cañon was cut by brooks. The snow was deep, up to the knees. My regi-

¹ A. France, *Les Dieux ont soif*.

² Watch-tower.

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ment took the positions along the first range which extended from the Serbian tower. The Bulgarians attacked us before light, early in the morning. I could see that they were in a great hurry, because they wanted to finish, finally, my regiment which, even though we had no artillery and insufficient ammunition, had always imposed upon them such serious and great losses, and always knew how to escape.

In the beginning I was with my company in the regiment's reserve placed in the valley between the two towers. I had to stand at one place in the snow up to my waist, where the wind swept over. Not a pleasant job! But, thank God, this pleasure was not for a long time. At eight o'clock in the morning I got an order to go to the end of the second range, which extended from the Turkish tower, for my colonel feared that, in spite of the distance and difficulty, the Bulgarians might creep up to this range, cross it, and reach the plateau, and thus surround the whole regiment. I was reinforced by an officer and two platoons. We started at once, glad to warm ourselves.

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I saw right away how far I was from my regiment and how dangerous my duty was. The position was dreadful! At the very end of the range were two peaks, separated by a valley. On the first I left the officer, Sergeant Trailo, three platoons, and my orders. I went to the other, with Cheda and the other three platoons. There were great forests everywhere; everywhere were the long, steep slopes, on which I could see but a little distance because of immense trees. The snow was very deep. What could I do here with a handful of men? How could I watch successfully such a great territory? But I did the best I knew. Behind us was a deep brook and quite a precipice with very steep sides. I reasoned that I was safe on this side, and so I sent the sentinels forward, and to the right and left sides of the hill.

The battle was raging on the other side on the first range. At first I was not attacked. I did not order trenches to be dug: first, because I had no time; secondly, it was quite impossible because of the deep snow; and finally, there were so many big trees that

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every one could find a shelter. The hours passed and nothing happened. There was a deep silence, the silence of a tomb, and only the trees crackled from the frost. The soldiers were standing behind the trees silent, their feet freezing. Suddenly a soldier ran out, breathless, and exclaimed: —

“The Bulgarians are coming from the left!”

He had not finished when another ran out.

“The Bulgarians are advancing along the brook behind us!”

A third man screamed from afar as if insane: —

“There they are at the right!”

Beautiful situation!

I understood it instantly. They wanted to cut us off on this hill, repulse the others on the other hill, hold the range, and so come to the plateau.

They half succeeded. I felt that my whole body trembled. The horror clutched our hearts, and the dreadfulness showed upon our faces. Oh, why are our hearts not made of steel, why do we have brains, why are we men? But all this was but for a moment. The

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next minute I recovered my coolness and called a soldier: —

“Run to Trailo, if it is possible, and tell him to retreat slowly to the first good position. Then he must report at once to the colonel, asking help in order to save the towers. Absolutely, he must not try to defend us, because then all would be lost. Do you understand? Go, run as fast as you can!”

The soldier ran. Then I ordered all sentinels to the top of the hill. I looked around me. I could see no farther than a hundred yards because of the tree-trunks. But one could hear, could feel everywhere around, a dull, hidden noise which came closer and closer. It seemed to me that I saw behind every tree the scowling, ugly, dreadful faces of those beasts, whose sly, devilish laughter echoed through the forest.

With resolute looks and expanded breasts my soldiers stood before me; at one glance I understood these true friends, these tried warriors, these undaunted lions. Then I felt such an unspeakable rage toward these, who, not two years ago, had begged us for help, and

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who now were creeping upon us from the depths and darkness of the forest, that I cried: —

“To the last man!”

“To the last!” replied my faithful Cheda, in a firm voice.

All the others looked straight in my eyes. They were ready.

I divided my men on four sides and every one chose his tree. A moment after the shots echoed rapidly from the right side. The bullets flew over our heads with the shrill sound of a furious woman, or they struck against the branches, which broke and fell upon the white snow. Then shots at the left, before us, and then from all sides. The broken branches fell like rain. Finally, wriggling like worms, hiding behind the trees, the black, devilish figures appeared.

“Fire!” I shouted.

And then this hill became a little volcano, which began to crush its mortal prey. The black figures disappeared behind the thick trees. When they appeared again, the volcano again belched its dreadful fire. “Ha, cruel

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men, the volcano is too much alive and will sell its crater very expensively." There was boiling and bubbling, as in hell, around this hill.

After a time the Bulgarians saw that it was a very costly thing to climb to the top at once in glorious victory. And they contented themselves to do this later in a different way. I understood them. They wanted to force us to use up all our ammunition, and then: "Hands up, bratko!"

This was dignified for them! This was quite on a level with these beasts. And these sneaking wolves loved this cat's play! I felt a tremendous bitterness in my breast; I wanted to jump from my own skin; I bit my lips; my clothes burned my flesh; my mouth was dry, and I stooped, grasped a handful of snow, and put it into my mouth.

The Bulgarians now attacked the second hill with all their power, leaving us in their dreadful trap. The fighting raged there for some time, then began to grow more and more distant, until, at last, we were alone.

Suddenly, as if some one struck me on the

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head, my hair rose, my heart stopped. I lost my breath, and I felt as if I should fall. The picture of little Rada came before my eyes. Oh, my dear little child! What! Not to see you any more? Not to see your beautiful eyes again? Our dear little stars! Not to hear again your sweet voice? What! Not to feel again your warm embrace, your little heart? And you? What will happen to you without us? What! Again shall you be hungry, naked, barefooted, again to go alone, to die on the road? No, no! Fly away dreadful thoughts, or I shall be insane, insane . . .

A creature crept to me. The face was black, the eyes were staring, the mouth was open, gasping for breath, and the hands were outstretched as though to repulse something dreadful. It was Cheda with the same thoughts. And this steely, cold man shivered like a small branch. From the depths of his breast came a painful exclamation:—

“Not to see him any more!”

Oh, my poor Cheda! Look around you. Why do you ask from me this terrible answer?

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Suddenly he jumped to his feet, seized my shoulders with both hands and shook me fiercely. He tried to speak, to tell me something, but only painful, husky sounds came from his throat. Insane! flashed through my head. God, what to do? Without realizing what I was doing I picked up a handful of snow and thrust it against his face, crying: —

“Cheda, Cheda, for Heaven’s sake, what is it?”

His face quivered and the words came: —

“Impossible, impossible, not to see him again! Do you hear me? It is *impossible*! We *must* see him . . . He must be with us . . . He *must not* die! We have to save ourselves . . . we have, we have . . .”

I worked a long time to calm him. Sometimes the most powerful man will have moments when he grows weak. Those moments for Cheda were now. When they passed, he became again the strong little man who could overcome almost incredible hindrances. Then I said to him: —

“If we could only hold out until the night.”

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“Impossible!” Cheda replied slowly. “The soldiers have only a hundred bullets apiece. And what is that? Nothing. One hour of time.”

“But we *have* to do *something*!” I exclaimed in a resolute voice.

“We *must*!” he replied firmly. After, he added slowly and sorrowfully: “But what? What?”

We were sitting beside each other making foolish, impracticable plans when he leaped to his feet and cried in an excited voice, pointing into the distance: —

“Fog! Do you see it?”

The tears flew to my eyes. O God, I thank Thee! In the distance, over a great mountain, rolled the fog like a gigantic river, which moved toward our hill.

“It is much better than the night!” exclaimed Cheda in a transport of gladness, and went to the soldiers. He crept from one to another, quickly telling something to each one. I left this old warrior, this wonderful, powerful man to act, feeling that only he could save us. And in myself I felt such a power,

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such a desire for life, such love, that I wished to embrace this whole nature, to embrace the unseen God who creates these wonders! The battle began to rage more and more fiercely.

Shortly after, Cheda again crept to me: —

“All is ready. As soon as the fog comes, and I think it will come very soon, we will run down to the brook behind us . . .”

“But this is a precipice!” I interrupted Cheda.

“There can be no precipices now. We must go, we must fly over, if necessary. When the fog comes, we will run down making our way with bombs. In order to confuse the Bulgarians on the other sides, Atsa, Jare, Kale, and your Meeloye will remain here, shooting continually. When they hear our bombs, they will throw theirs also, that the Bulgarians may think that we are fighting on all sides. Do you think so too?”

“It is good. But what will those who remain do?”

“Somebody has to be sacrificed,” said Cheda.

Then we both went to the soldiers explain-

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ing to them what they were to do. The Bulgarians had formed a cruel ring nearly around us. A great wave of impatience surged through my body, as if I already felt their hot breath and heard their rough laughter.

Like a rushing flood the heavy, icy fog quickly enveloped the whole hill. The Bulgarians, who had not seen the fog coming, were now so astonished that their guns stopped for a short time. The soldiers came noiseless as shadows to Cheda and me. The four guns on the four sides were shooting like twenty.

"All?" I asked the soldiers in a low voice.

"Yes!"

"Have you unscrewed your bombs?"

"Yes!"

"In one line, and forward!"

Cheda was beside me. He looked at me. Oh, this look! Never can words say such a farewell! *Pck!* as he struck the cap of his bomb against a stone. The bomb was lit. Then he swung it round and round, saying: "Now, my 'black friend,' make the way!" And the black friend flew far, far.

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We did the same. The little volcano crashed its last terrible fire . . . Then . . . How can I tell you this, which I myself cannot tell.

Torn, bloody, and exhausted, we sought long into the night our regiment. We did not know where it had retreated or what had happened to it. Finally, after midnight, we saw hundreds and hundreds of fires. It was my division. After half an hour of looking and asking, we found my company at last. Dark shadows sat around their big fires. Before one of them I saw little Rada. Bent, with his head in his hands, I recognized again the little sad man loaded again with the old heavy burden. My heart just wanted to jump out from my breast. Cheda and I ran and fell beside him, one on each side . . . There are no words to describe our happiness! Oh! How he embraced us, how he kissed us! And through his happy tears he spoke: —

“My nana always told me that I should say prayers to God’s mother and she will help me. I said prayers all the day long for you!”

* * *

OUR CHILD

“Apples?” said Trailo, very much surprised.

“Yes, apples! If you bring apples to me, I will kiss you,” replied little Rada, laughing.

I have told that Trailo was a very strange man. Rough, unintelligent, quite wild, the discipline of many years had made a solid stone, a good machine. Unfortunately this stone was not without a heart. At first, when Rada’s love could not pierce his armor, he did not want to see the child. He never spoke to him, and when he had to speak to him, he did so as over an axe. He had often asked: —

“How is it possible that there can be a child in a disciplined company?”

But later, when he saw how the rest of us loved our child, and cared for him, he began to think. And still later, when he saw what a golden child little Rada was, how good and joyful he always was, when he, at last, found out that he was the only element of happiness for us, he began to love him too. Trailo went from one extreme to the other and became crazy about little Rada. But too late.

SERBIA CRUCIFIED

Now Rada did not want to see him. Poor Trailo! What was there in the world that he did not do to please the child? He made him popguns and whistles, he gave his watch and his small gun to him, he sang to him, and told funny stories, he carried him on his shoulders, he lifted him twenty times in the air, and three hundred other wonderful things he did for him. But in vain! Dear child! Rada loved him; he told this to every one of us, but he did n't want to tell him. This was Rada's caprice. A childish joy! A new source for jokes and laughter. But as Trailo could not understand this he had the pain of Tantalus.

Rada was very fond of apples. They were his weak point. You could do anything with him if you gave him apples. This night, he had said to Trailo that his kiss cost ten apples! There was much laughter! But Trailo took the matter very seriously. Apples! Where could they be found now? Because of that he asked angrily: —

“Do you really want apples?”

“Ten of them!” Little Rada made this serious statement from Cheda's lap.

OUR CHILD

Trailo sighed, got up, and said to me: —

“I beg you, Lieutenant, let me go. I promise to be back before we go to position.”

And not waiting for my answer he ran into the darkness. I became very sorrowful. We were in the midst of the Albanians, who used every occasion for their wild vengeance. Whenever they found a soldier alone, or a small group of them, they killed without mercy. Knowing this I began to reproach little Rada, who grew serious and then began to weep. Cheda was angry with me.

“Why do you reproach the child? That crazy old man ought to know what he is doing.”

The next day the fighting began, but Trailo had not come. I was very, very anxious. What if he had been killed by the Albanians? It would be terrible, for Trailo was truly a hero who always wished to be killed in a hand-to-hand fight. And yet, I felt a satisfaction. For if this wild and seemingly heartless man loved this child so much that he was willing to sacrifice his life for its pleasure, how much more would these men, who loved Rada, do,

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not only for him, but for Serbia, its children and its future.

That day the fighting was very good for us, and the positions excellent. We were on a hill, covered with small thick woods. Before us was the bare valley, through which the Bulgarians had to pass. They had scarcely succeeded in passing half of it, when we nailed them with our fire. They had scarcely time to dig miserable little trenches in which to hide their heads; and even this was done at a great cost of their lives. Then, in their rage and powerlessness they began to shoot with "dum-dum"¹ bullets, which, striking against the small stones around us, had exploded and filled our eyes with dust, earth, and stinging smoke; or they smashed our gun-stocks, gun-barrels, and heads . . .

"Hae! Hae! Are you there?" exclaimed a joyful voice behind us.

I turned my head. Trailo was standing there, red, smiling, with both hands lifted, in one of which he held a full knapsack. He was wild with joy.

¹ Explosive bullets.

OUR CHILD

"Look! Full knapsack! I ran all night . . ."

"Lie down!" I shouted in terror.

He did n't hear me, but kept on talking.

"Fourteen are in it. Beautiful, red! I felt three hundred pains when I looked for them. I paid five deenars ¹ to those animals . . ."

"*Lie down*, when I tell you! Can you not see that they are shooting with dum-dum bullets?"

"Oo-h! Breega mene! I don't care! You know, Lieutenant, five deenars! But really they are beautiful! How happy little Rada will be! How he will lo . . ."

Suddenly a sound! As if something had struck against thin dry wood, and then, a muffled boom. Trailo's brains spattered me. For an instant his crushed head hovered in the air, red and awful. Then it flew in an appalling circle and fell into the trench. The dead hand still held the knapsack of apples.

"Where is Trailo? Where are my apples?" asked poor Rada when Julock brought him the next night. We were all silent with bowed heads. Rada looked upon us bewildered.

¹ Francs.

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Then he began to understand, for those scenes had often occurred, and asked, frightened: —

“Where is my Trailo?”

“Here are the apples,” said Cheda in a low tone.

Now Rada quite understood; he fell in my arms and began to cry convulsively.

“Oh, I know all. Every time I ask you why somebody does not come, you are always silent and never tell me anything. But I know they were killed. Oh! Bogo-moi! And bata Atsa, and Keetsa, and cheeka Meloye, and Marko and Glavonya, and bata Kale, and Geeka and all, all the others . . . I know that they were killed, and you would n’t tell me anything, but are always silent. And now you are silent when I ask you for Trailo. And he is killed too! He was killed by the Albanians because of me, because of my apples.”

“Be quiet, Rada. He was not killed by the Albanians, but by the fighting,” I said to him, and tried to quiet his great pain.

But he cried still more: —

“I know all; he was killed by the Albanians

OUR CHILD

because of my apples! Oh, kookoo-mene! I will not eat the apples! Never will I eat them . . .”

It was a long time before he grew quiet and went to sleep. Yet in his sleep he still moaned and slept very uneasily, twitching all night.

After a while I noticed a change in Rada which caused me great anxiety. Even though he was cheerful, yet it was not quite the same. And during the last few days he had grown tired very quickly; he would be quiet for a long time and wanted to be in Cheda's or my lap. Then he would go to sleep very quickly. And sleeping in our arms we felt that his head was hot. Cheda had the same anxiety, but he did not dare to tell me.

This night his head was burning hot. Cheda and I were sitting near him and bending over him. We were silent and motionless. Once Cheda touched his forehead, sighed deeply, and whispered: —

“He's burning! God! If he grows sick?”

I felt a dreadful pain in my heart, yet I kept calm, and said quietly in order to reassure Cheda: —

SERBIA CRUCIFIED

“Oh, it’s nothing! It is only from to-day’s emotion.”

Cheda shook his head doubtfully. And I myself did not believe what I said, and a great terror clutched me. The soldiers who heard this and who were anxious, too, got up and were gathering around Rada. And as a mother hovers over her only child, fearing it is sick, so hovered these unhappy soldiers over little Rada. And perhaps no mother ever asked with greater feeling, than the lips of these soldiers had whispered: —

“God! Will you send to us this culmination of unhappiness?”

* * *

“I implore, I implore you, Doctor, to save him!” cried out Cheda wringing his hands in pitiful distress.

That of which we did not dare to think, that of which we had the most terror, now came. Little Rada grew terribly sick!

We had not seen Rada for two days after the night when Trailo was killed, for all komora went to Preestina. During this time

OUR CHILD

we were very anxious, for when we parted from Rada, we saw that he was changed, in spite of all his efforts to be gay and to make jokes as usual. We saw how great an effort he made to do this. And when he got on the back of his Beeja, and said, "God help you! I will see you again!" his voice was so sad and so weak. And finally, during all this time, we felt that he was sick, as we would feel if one part of our being was sick, for Rada was bound to our hearts, mingled with our whole life. Black, dark, sorrowful thoughts were with us during all this time.

And this night when we came behind Preestina, after the last battle which my regiment had, what terrible moments we had waiting for Rada. At last Julock came, carrying Rada in his arms, and Beeja followed them with drooping head.

"In God's name, what is it?" I exclaimed, and jumped up when I saw them coming.

Julock was silent.

"So help me God, it is nothing!" said Rada, raising his head from Julock's arm. "It is nothing. Cheeka Julock always thinks I am

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very sick, but I only have a little sore throat. To-morrow I will be all well. I am well now. Here, you can see . . .” And he slid down from Julock’s arms and ran to Cheda.

Then Rada shook hands with everybody, embraced everybody, and talked to all, as usual; but soon he lost his strength and came to Cheda’s lap, laying his head wearily against his breast. He grew very weak and sank in Cheda’s arms. I saw how rapidly his little breast rose and fell.

“God, how he is burning! The child has fever!” cried Cheda.

And there was night, cold wind, desert, icy stones everywhere around, and no help from anywhere! All night the soldiers ran to find the regiment’s doctor, but in vain. All night Rada did not sleep. All night we listened with aching hearts to Rada’s moans. Day came and we had to start. We wanted to carry him, but he did not want to hear of this.

“Why do you want to feel that I am very sick when I am *not*. I can ride. And then my Beeja would weep without me!” he said, trying to smile.

OUR CHILD

O God, what a terrible time! Through what moments a man has to pass! For in this one day I endured more unhappiness than in all the time since war had begun.

To-day we passed over Kossovo.¹ Serbian Kossovo Field! What is contained in this one phrase! What it means, explains, and speaks to my whole nation! On it, six centuries before, died Serbian Liberty, after a dreadful superhuman battle with Mohammedan tribes. On it was beheaded holy Tsar² by the foul and sacrilegious hand of bald Mooya. On it fell Meelosh-Obeeletchu, Kosantcheetch-Ivane, Topleetsa-Meelane, the nine dear brothers of Yoogovitcha, standard-bearer Boshko, the

¹ Kossovo is a large plain in the southwestern part of Serbia, where, on the 15th of June, 1389, there was a battle between Turks and Serbians, in which the Serbians were defeated and lost their political independence, which they did not regain for more than five centuries. The Serbian people looked upon Kossovo Plain as one of their most sacred and historical places. It has always been the inspiration of the most beautiful Serbian national songs.

² Lazar, Tsar, otherwise "Knez-Lazar," ruled over Serbia from 1375 to 1389. After the battle of Kossovo he was taken prisoner and beheaded in the presence of the mortally wounded and dying Murad I. He had tried to create a "Christian League" from neighboring states against Turkish invasion. Later he was buried in the cloister of Ravanitsa, and is worshiped as a saint by the whole Serbian nation.

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youngest among them — all, all great heroes! Yes, on it set the sun of Serbian Liberty, which did not rise again for five centuries! From it did not flow the sweet spring water, where flowed the blood of the whole nation! On it the little nightingale did not warble where the wild *hidook* shot his *javerdar*! Only the gray eagle soared from it to the dim clouds, telling to them its pain!

On thee, after nearly six centuries of abject slavery, the sun of Serbian Liberty rose again. On thee slavery's chain was broken! Once again the trumpet-toned songs echoed from Serbian breasts, proclaiming the new time, the new happiness!

O immense plain! O great Kossovo! Great, old monument! O eternal hope of ours! O cradle of glory! O creator of undying Serbian songs! O endless cemetery in which are lying the bones of a hundred thousand! O sacred mirror of my nation! O sacred Kossovo, of what art thou thinking, what art thou feeling? Now, when over thine ancient shoulders are flying thy people? Leaving thee, their dear Kossovo! I heard thy sigh! Thine, and

OUR CHILD

that deepest and most painful of those thousands, whose bones thou art still keeping in thine embrace!

And we crossed Kossovo to-day with our sick Rada! Oh, my good reader, can you not see how weak words are before this great unhappiness? And yet the human heart must suffer all this, suffer and still live and beat, in order to suffer still more.

Little Rada had ridden Beeja all the forenoon, but after that he could no longer ride. Suddenly he grew very weak. All the courage of his little heart, all his force, his will, had passed. The terrible sickness had grasped him in its relentless power!

Then we carried him — one after another — as our greatest treasure. We went silently with bowed heads over Kossovo Field, and in our arms our child moaned sadly.

When we had crossed Kossovo and night came, we stopped and made fires. Rada was lying on a little pile of straw, twisting in pain, opening wide his mouth for air, stretching out his little hands, seeking help! Help! Oh, my God! Was ever such a night as this! Since

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five o'clock in the evening I had ridden on horseback everywhere to find the doctor. Finally, far in the night, I succeeded in finding him and brought him hurriedly to Rada. He was a young man, very good, and an excellent friend of mine. He loved Rada very much, as did the whole regiment, and so he came quickly to help him. Oh, my good man!

Now he was kneeling before the fire, trying to look into Rada's throat, holding his head with one hand. I was holding a little dim lantern and Cheda was beseeching without stopping:—

“Save him, I implore you, Doctor!”

At last the doctor slowly let go the child's head which Cheda took and pressed against his breast. Little Rada began to moan again.

“What is it?” I asked the doctor, shivering.

He was silent. He sat down before the fire, covered his face with both hands and sighed deeply. I grasped his shoulder and shook him:—

“In God's name, speak! What is it?”

OUR CHILD

“Diphtheria!” he said with greatest pain.

Ah! My hair rose and a cold sweat broke out upon me.

“And?”

“Oh, Meecha, why do you ask me when you know for yourself . . .”

“What! You cannot help him?” I interrupted him with sinking heart.

“How? I need serum, I need a hypodermic, a bed, care, ice-packs, milk, drugs . . . and . . . where can I find all these here?”

“It means that there is no help? He must die!” I exclaimed, as insane.

The doctor looked at me. His eyes were full of tears. Then his head fell and he whispered: —

“Yes, he must die!”

A dreadful scream! The scream of a man who has been struck deep in the heart by a knife. And Cheda exclaimed, pressing the child against his breast: —

“Impossible, impossible, I *will not* permit this!”

The heads of my soldiers, who gazed at the doctor with wide-open eyes, after his words,

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were bowed; the last stroke had fallen upon them.

"He must die!" ran in my head unceasingly, and I sat and gazed into the fire all night.

"Nana! . . . nana! . . . where is my nana? . . . I want my nana!" moaned little Rada in delirium, stretching out his little hands in the darkness, toward the black sky.

* * *

The next day, oh, destiny, destiny, we *had* to go forward. Again we carried our sick child. Sadly we went on through this dark, desert, terrible land, upon which God himself had turned his back. Before us were the gigantic black and white Albanian Alps. And we went toward them with a sick child!

Rain began to fall — the heavy, cold, winter rain, which brought the culmination of such misery as made these moments impossible, unbearable . . . We had to roll little Rada in a flap of a tent, and this made his condition much worse, for the poor child needed much the fresh air. We went on

OUR CHILD

slowly, sinking in the deep mud, quite up to our knees. And everywhere were so many soldiers, wagons, horses . . .

Little Rada had not eaten for more than twenty-four hours. The sickness was such that he could swallow nothing but milk. Then I sent my soldiers in all directions to find milk. Poor men! They ran all day in this awful weather, but all came back, sad, exhausted, muddy to the neck, with empty cans. Is there no milk in this land? An Albanian would rather give poison than milk to a sick child! Now, and from hunger, you have to die, my poor child!

When I took little Rada to carry, he would slowly reach out his little hot hand, he would embrace me with it, he would look at me with his beautiful eyes, sunken, feverish, and burning, and he would say slowly and painfully: —

“The good God will not let me die, for I love you so much, just as I love my nana!”

My poor child! Do not seek your nana among those who are alive, from those unhappy ones from whom they are taking every-

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thing, even those they love the most! Soon you will embrace your real nana.

The raging wind drove the icy rain. I covered the child again, and when I could see his little face no more, I wept.

Beeja went at the rear of the company with the other horses. He went slowly, all wet, with drooping ears. Maybe with his animal instinct he knew that now he was entirely useless, and he went along with his nose to the mud.

In the evening the rain ceased. Then we stopped, and with great difficulty built fires. The soldiers found a little dry straw somewhere, on which we put Rada. The night brought still greater pain for the poor child. Cheda and I sat on each side of him, watching his awful suffering. Looking without helping! Cheda was . . . Oh, how *can* I describe this to you? Imagine yourselves in those moments, good mothers, and create the picture. How would *you* feel?

If the rain ceased, the fog fell — dreadful heavy fog. And it was the worst. All the air for little Rada was destroyed. Indescribable

OUR CHILD

pain! And in one moment, when the child was most tortured by pain, when he opened wide his mouth gasping for air, when in his throat something rattled terribly, when his little breast moved no more, when his hand clutched the air seeking help, then Cheda in a desperate moment put his two fingers in the child's throat to remove that which suffocated him.

"What are you doing, unhappy?" I exclaimed, pulling back his arm.

"What! To look quietly when he is suffering so dreadfully? What! Not to help him? What! There is really no help? O God! God . . ."

Thus passed the night and two more days.

* * *

"He's dying! He's dying!" cried out Cheda.

With his little hands still clutching the air for help, with little numb legs, with open mouth from which the terrible husky sound still came, with staring eyes, with his head on my arms, the child writhed in the last agony, in his dying gasp . . . Our little Rada,

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our child, our love, our hope, our future was dying!

“Oh, my heart! My sweet soul! Hear me!” cried out Cheda, shaking the child in insane desperation.

“Hear me! *Don't* die! *Don't* leave us! We love you, so, so much . . . and no one will love you as we did! Oh, my heart! Oh, my child! We will take you with us to Italy!¹ Yes, to Italy, where there is always sunshine. And there we will buy fine clothes for you. The finest suit! And big horns! . . . Oh, hear me, my child! Here is thy bata Meecha, and thy cheeka Cheda . . . and all thy soldiers. Tell them again: ‘Attention!’ Tell them again . . . O God! God! Dreadful! . . . Look . . . he’s dying, he’s dying!” . . . echoed these words through the terrible night, through this desert.

Suddenly Cheda started, and exclaimed, frightened: —

“What! He shall die without a candle?”

A soldier came to the fire and lighted a piece of *lootch*,² which he gave to Cheda.

¹ At this time we had heard that the whole Serbian army would be evacuated to Italy.

² A thin stick of pine wood.

OUR CHILD

"This is in place of a candle."

Cheda took the burning stick with trembling hand and put it in Rada's hands and folded them over his breast. With the last strength the hands clasped around the stick. And in a last deep sigh, from which all his little body shook, his little soul flew from his tortured body . . . and little Rada became a little angel who flew straight to the arms of his nana . . .

The pitchwood burned slowly and lighted his pale face, and his wide-open eyes. Eyes! His beautiful eyes! Our dear little stars! The stars of our happiness! Now dead . . . From the pitchwood came slowly burning tar, which ran down, making streaks on his little hands, on his dead hands!

Around midnight the snow began to fall . . .

* * *

The dawn grew white, yet nothing could be seen, for the heavy fog covered everything. Where the fire was, snow had fallen . . . We were all motionless and stiffened by the terrible unhappiness and cold . . . before us was a

SERBIA CRUCIFIED

white pile. It was the flap of the tent which covered little Rada . . .

The soldiers who were passing by would stop astonished. Then they understood. Slowly, they took off their caps, crossed themselves, and went on again, sad, silent, with bent heads, toward the white mountains.

“We have to bury him,” said Cheda, speaking very low.

When I lifted my head and looked at Cheda, I did not recognize him. It was dreadful — what one night made of this man, this father, this Serbian!

Afterwards the soldiers with greatest pain dug the frozen earth. They dug the grave — the grave for our little Rada, for our dear little child, for our happiness . . .

We put little Rada in the case of our company's archives, which we took out from it and bound in a flap of a tent. When the soldiers were lowering the case into the grave, I embraced Cheda. And yet only these men, only these fathers, can help in these sorrows . . . Oh, my good Cheda! How much we were asking from you!

OUR CHILD

Never, over one grave, had fallen more bitter tears than over this simple little mound . . . and never warmer prayers came from human hearts.

Two Albanians shivering with cold, with their fingers in the little pockets of their trousers, with their heads wrapped in white rags, were standing there and wondering what we were doing.

“What is the name of this place?” I asked them later: at least to know the place where our child was buried.

The Albanians looked at me in an insane way, still more astonished, shrugged their shoulders, and they said their eternal: “Skaa-heetch!”

They did not understand me.

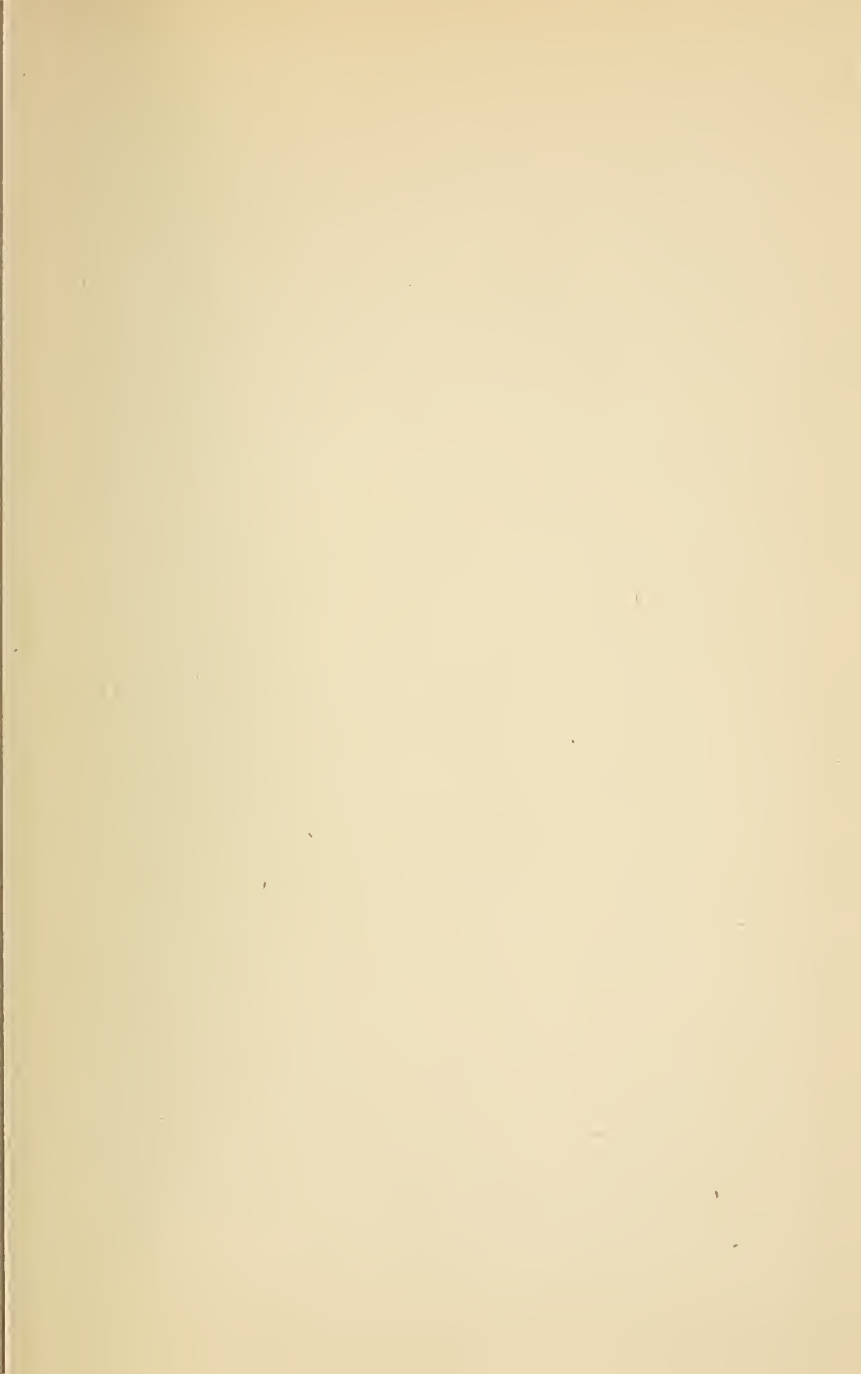
God! Will they, when we go away, dig up, destroy Rada's grave from religious fanaticism, or from wild instinct, or from bloody vengeance, or simply to take the case and child's clothing?

THE END

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